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THE OCCUPATION

THE OCCUPATION



ANTHONY BLOND
LONDON

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PART I

It was the second winter of Hitler's occupation of Britain. There was no meat, and the coal ration was pitifully small. The messages of good cheer which we received with difficulty from Radio Free England warmed neither our hearts nor our houses. The Monarchy and the Government in Exile in Canada might persist in their optimism, but most people in Britain then believed that the Quisling government, the German soldiers in the restaurants and the concentration camps at Welwyn Garden City and Bangor were here to stay. Even the Resistance often seemed at that time little more than a secret game in which a few romantic misfits satisfied their instincts for conspiracy and for violence. Yet, in truth, we, the ordinary, negative, bewildered mass of the population saw in the Resistance the single hope of our generation. Casualties of the century, beaten back by the strongest winds of ill-fortune that had ever torn across the kingdom, our lives as humdrum under the Occupation as before the war, each day some new, brilliantly conceived act of sabotage or assassination came to stimulate our drooping spirits. Those unknown men of the Resistance, the silent men of violence and destruction whom we sensed everywhere around us, moving purposefully in the sullen crowd, gave us a little self-respect. . . .

I

LONDON. November, and (as Dickens would agree) very obviously so. Wreathes of fog swirled down the streets as if they were ghosts of waves. As if London were a great drowned capital in a legend of antiquity. London, the new Atlantis, overwhelmed by the tides of the century. Lights glimmered wanly, indiscreetly, criminally, through cracks between old curtains in Victorian houses, in the long glum streets of the suburbs as in the proud, silent squares. The Curfew Bell sounded an hour ago, being rung out by the churches like a parody of Compline. Take a walk through Resistance London towards seven in the evening and you will think, if you have not been there before, that it is long past midnight. Of course, it is like the grave in Threadneedle Street, and Poultry, and along Cheapside—but then it was almost like that at that hour before the war. It is only when you get to Fleet Street that you will begin to notice the difference, to sense the iron claw of a censored Press clutching nervously over the old citadels of the fourth estate. Old Parr's bar, for instance, stands idle like a journalist on a Saturday, though its upstanding publican waits as ever inside cashing cheques for collaborationists caught short of money for the night's black marketeering. Walk westwards along the Strand and here even the ghosts are dead. Here you may see the dull scars of shelling caused by artillery bombardment in the last week

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before the collapse. Simpson's, Rules and the old Edwardian restaurants which our fathers knew—all have closed. In the Savoy one solitary German general dines alone (accompanied by his eyeglass, though), surrounded by nearly forty waiters. All the empty tables around him are like those many islands in the South Pacific which used to be coloured red, for British, and are now desolate, after their ravaging by the Japanese. Piccadilly? Dark, of course, but in some ways less dispiriting. The endless wastes of tarts stretching from here to the Albert Hall for the benefit of the German soldiery give a raffishness to the scene that even the prudish must welcome. Better a few splashes of garish paint than the gloom in Westminster and the City. The theatres of Shaftesbury Avenue appear at least half-closed, but those which are open have 'house full' notices outside. They begin early, at six or half past, but are naturally popular with the poor Germans who have nothing to do in the evening. The acting profession has been 'realistic' about the war, and, reluctantly no doubt, plays to the Germans as it did to the English. Life is short, after all, and art is long. In Pall Mall the clubs also seem open, or some of them. Peer through the windows of the Athenaeum and you will see several elderly and eminent men stretched in their armchairs, lording it like conquerors and happily muttering, 'Of course we're ruined.' And then walk on up St James's Street. Walk into Mayfair. What do you find? Discretion, yes. Few lights glimmer here. The streets are as empty as the rest. If one were Michael Arlen one would have the entrée where one wants. Fling back those heavy curtains, my lord, and let the world see within. Not so much has changed. Here is plenty of red meat, good wine and good talk. Not everywhere, of course. But there are oases in every

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desert, and in South Audley Street, Hay Hill and Mount Street there are several of them clustered together. Many great men in England, after all, especially those with great estates to maintain, believe that they have a duty to live in a certain way, regardless of who rules at Westminster. And some of them feel they have a duty to entertain whoever does rule at Westminster. Look carefully, therefore, at that great car parked in Hays Mews, in whose back five SS men can sit comfortably. Which, we demand, curiously, of the lavish householders in Chesterfield Street is entertaining Goering tonight? We are interested, history is interested, and we feel impelled to peer through the thick curtains and blinds. We just see a few candles, some glasses, perhaps ten brilliantly lit pairs of hands working away in the accepted fashion with knife and fork, the faces shaded because of the way the candles are placed; and we hear the same chatter, malice, conspiracy, that we have heard a thousand times before. Pass on, therefore, if you wish to see the real character of London under the Occupation, towards the northern suburbs. Here, if, shivering, you allow your curiosity to get the better of you as it did in Chesterfield Street, you will also find hands working in that same old way. But they will be handling lentils, not pheasants. There may be candles but these will be for economy, not romance. It is in these houses that the great mass of us live. It is here that the great battle for the English soul is being fought. These cold hearths are the private fronts of the world campaign. Remember that slogan so popular during the first week after the German invasion: 'They will not pass here!' It is true, though Marshal Pétain would not have thought so. They have not passed.

Here, then, the spirit of the Resistance is everlastingly

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kindled. Here there is will to fight. But with what? Where are your guns, where are your hand grenades, where are your armoured cars? Wait, for they will come. Hear, if you will, a voice from Radio Free England, heard now, at night (though not in Chesterfield Street):

‘The Nazi hordes will be pressed back across the narrow seas. A vast armada will be gathered to free our island from this infamy. Let us recall that our nation has passed through great trials before and emerged victorious. I do not for one moment doubt that, within a very few months, it will be possible for a statesman to rise in one of the Houses of Parliament at Westminster and repeat, as did my old friend Lord Curzon in 1919, the words of our great national poet of liberty, Percy Bysshe Shelley:

The World's great age begins anew,
The golden years return,
The earth doth like a snake renew
Her winter weeds outworn:
Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam,
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream.

Good night, my friends, and do not be discouraged. Help is near. God save the King!’

2

‘WRECKS of a dissolving dream!’ Poetry meant more to us that winter than at any other time. More even than in our ’teens, though this was a time whose passions and frustrations were curiously similar to those of adolescence. If the Press be censored, and if the only books published are those which fawn on the conqueror, imagination drives one to express ideas of liberty in strange ways. A poem becomes a message left in a bottle, to be picked up and deciphered by other free men, freely seeking their way to freedom. Poetry was the key, indeed, of the Resistance.

‘Wrecks of a dissolving dream!’ Michael repeated the words to himself as he lay on a roof-top in Pall Mall. A hundred feet beneath him lay that discreet street, trod now, as always, by sleek civil servants and clubmen. Behind was a fire escape which would enable him to escape into a small courtyard and then up Crown Passage, and away to freedom. For along Michael’s arm lay a rifle. It would be the work of a moment for him to fire over the parapet when Sir Stanley Jackson, surrounded by SS men, appeared from out of the Athenaeum. This was his mission: the murder of Jackson, the man of collaboration. It was not, Michael’s friends in the Resistance had told him, that the removal of Jackson would mean a great change in the structure of English life. It was simply that

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his assassination would be a great fillip to the Resistance. It was also, Michael knew, his own testing in the movement. 'Try and look upon us like a club,' they had told him, using language that they thought that he would understand, 'a club for which there are certain entrance requirements. To prove yourself, you must have blood on your hands. You must be compromised with us. You must have, shall we say, a wound. You understand?' Michael had shrugged his shoulders and agreed. Naturally he had agreed. He had expected something of the sort. Idly he wondered whether this blooding was demanded of everybody. He supposed not. He supposed that it was exacted only from persons of dubious loyalty such as himself. He had, he realized, from the Resistance's point of view, a bad record. He had not opposed the National Government before the war. He had not marched with the hunger marchers nor had he agitated for Arms for Spain. Once upon a time, at Cambridge, he had even been rash enough to admit, in the Union, that there was 'something to be said for Herr Hitler, and more for Signor Mussolini'. Really, of course, Michael had been nothing before the war. He had done nothing. He remembered a strange scene in, was it 1838, when one hundred unemployed invaded the Grill Room at the Ritz and asked for tea. He had been there, and he recalled how Cynthia Stoll had said, 'But, surely, it isn't tea-time!' The Marie Antoinette of the Ritz Hotel, Michael had christened her, like Lady Macbeth of the Mtemsk district.

Strange how all these thoughts came back to him, as he waited for Sir Stanley Jackson. Strange how, though he had never shot anyone before, he was thinking about all the events leading to his present discomfort on the roof-top rather

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than about any repugnance for what he was about to do. Perhaps he had always supposed that death and insult were occupational risks in a politician's life. They got many good things out of their possession of power—or at least so he supposed, recalling the complacency of all the politicians he had ever met—and they would have to take the rough with the smooth. Odd, thought Michael, that he made this grim judgement with a sporting metaphor, a metaphor taken from golf, which he had never played.

The point is, he thought, pulling himself together, there is one thing that I can do really well. That is to shoot. I can hit a man or a bird anywhere within sight. He had won prizes, even at Bisley, and would have won more if he had only been less lazy. He was still, as he knew, somewhat lazy. And he was still a very good shot. And now he was proving himself to the Resistance even though he held a good cover job with a collaborationist publisher. What a funny life he was having, he thought to himself, suddenly overcome with absurd frivolity. He had no doubt whatever that he would kill Sir Stanley. He looked down again at the street. Steady now, the front door of the Athenaeum was being opened! Cars were drawing up in front of it. Michael had, though he did not realize it, an iron nerve and no conscience. He felt no more qualms about what he had to do than if he had been on Lord Stoll's grouse moor and if Sir Stanley had been a fat young grouse. He was a born assassin, he thought cheerfully to himself. Yes, the door of the club was certainly being opened. A covey of Gestapo men were coming out, treading delicately, as security men always do. Michael could have picked them off one by one if he had wanted to. He was subconsciously a little cross that he could not now show off the elegance of his

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shooting, the style with which he raised his gun to his shoulder. Still, for a moment, he actually thought that he was back on the moors, the wind and rain blowing in his face, his dog intelligent at his side, and little black specks suddenly appearing out of the osier beds. . . .

3

WHILE Sir Stanley Jackson knew that he was unpopular he did not realize that he was hated. He regarded himself as chosen by God to carry out 'certain measures which, in the last resort, will be found to be of lasting value to the nation'. He genuinely believed those statesmen who had gone abroad after the defeat to be guilty of cowardice. Someone, after all, had to run the country. The King's Government had, he repeated to himself, to go on—even though the King might be over the water. I have committed no crime, he told his family, I have simply recognized facts. We were defeated in the field and I made a peace which was not without honour. I am supported in my government by a majority of the members of my party. Parliament may not have sat for a year, but it will do so shortly, and there can be no doubt that I shall gain a vote of confidence. I have secured, not without difficulty, conditions which compare well with those in other occupied countries. My relations with Field Marshal von Hassell are excellent and I have gained as a result a remission of certain of the armistice terms. Conditions in the camps at Bangor and at Welwyn may not be ideal but at least they are not atrocious. The German soldiers posted in Britain have behaved very well, and the Gestapo has been irreproachable. The black market is kept within bounds. Food is

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adequate. 'There is only one blot on the horizon,' Sir Stanley had that day remarked to his Cabinet, 'and that is the Resistance. Were it not for that group of riff-raff and bolshevists it might even be possible that the censorship could be relaxed and certain of the more prominent intellectuals released from Welwyn. But if these crimes and acts of sabotage continue, we shall have no choice save to impose harsher measures on the population. . . .'

'The Resistance ruins everything,' Sir Stanley was telling Mr Gawthorp, once the chief whip of his party, and now general adviser to the government on industrial affairs. The two men stood facing each other in the smoke-room of the Athenaeum. Each was dressed in striped trousers, short black coat and waistcoat, wing collar and grey tie. Upon the head of each the hair receded fastidiously. They were of an age and of a height. They were decent men and anxious to do the right thing.

'They are all communists,' Mr Gawthorp answered.

'A pretty kettle of fish,' said Sir Stanley, strumming on the table. He glanced up at the busts of Gladstone, Rosebery, Palmerston and other statesmen of the past on the top of the bookshelf. Sir Stanley had no false pride but he could not help thinking that his tasks were immeasurably more difficult than theirs. Yet he did not flinch from them. Never for a second did he wonder to himself why it should be he—and not any of the hundred others of his contemporaries—who should be here, in this amazing position, talking to Gawthorp, surrounded by guards.

'Well, well,' he said at last, since Gawthorp said nothing, 'we'll just have to see.' He walked to the door and told the

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lieutenant in charge of the guard that he would be leaving in five minutes.

'For Downing Street?'

'For Downing Street.'

4

‘MICHAEL is after Jackson tonight.’

RON Beasley was speaking. He was the secretary of the Marylebone Communist Party. Sitting round him in his house in Constable Road were the other members of the Executive Committee. These were Craig, Edwards, Thomas and Ann Mullaly. All of them owed their positions in the party to the imprisonment of the pre-war members of the E.C. in Bangor. They were all young—Beasley being the oldest, at thirty-five. None of them had been in the party before 1939, except Edwards, who was said to have fought in Spain. But had he? Edwards was a mystery even in the party, and Beasley had once or twice concluded that he was an *agent provocateur*. But then suppose he was? Who would he be provoking for? And would not his long association with the party, even if bogus, make him suspect in the eyes even of those for whom he was working? Who whom, as Lenin put it? How complicated it all was!

‘Will he get him?’ Edwards asked, sensing that Beasley’s thoughts were fixed on him, and feeling almost willed to speak.

Beasley shrugged his shoulders. ‘I shouldn’t think so. He is said to be a good shot. But that is on the grouse moor. That is one thing. This, he may find, is another.’ He laughed,

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sharply, gratingly, as if the very mention of such a thing was a joke.

'He is upper class,' Ann Mullaly said, 'they are more reliable than the *bourgeoisie*. They are better shots always.' Though herself originally a middle-class girl, she was now declassed, as only a member of the middle class can be. She struck Beasley as a cold fish, though she was a good party worker. She had drowned her rather angular prettiness in the great sea of the party. Tall, unsmiling, pale, she was always without make-up. Really, Beasley thought, she misses the point of being a woman. Not, of course, that he was one to complain.

'What happens if Jackson is killed?' asked Thomas. He was an old member of the electrical trades union. He had always been a Marxist, but had been a communist only for a year. For ten years he had been a dogged member of the Marylebone Labour Party. In 1935 he had spoken during the famous Brighton Conference in support of Bevin against Lansbury. The general eclipse of the socialists, following the imprisonment of all their leading members, had turned him, an opportunist who was not in the least personally ambitious, into a communist. He simply respected success.

While everyone wondered what to answer to Thomas, Mrs Beasley came in with biscuits and tea. Ron Beasley caught himself feeling glad that she was not a member of the party, but a woman who simply accepted her husband's position as a matter of course. She would, he reflected, have brought in biscuits to him and his friends even if he had been one of Mosley's boys. She knew nothing of politics, and Ron, who was usually so fond of teaching people things, had made no attempt to carry out her education.

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Mrs Beasley, for her part, hated women politicians. For this reason she hated Ann Mullaly. Or, rather, that was the reason that she said she hated Ann Mullaly. Her dislike was caused by the fact that in her eyes Ann Mullaly represented sex. Here again there was a paradox, since the other members of the E.C. regarded Ann Mullaly as the opposite of everything feminine.

'They'll telephone me here whatever happens to Jackson. Then we can decide what to do next. We are responsible, remember, for the old Westminster area.'

They all nodded. None were likely to forget what had happened to the Westminster C.P. eighteen months before. Every member of the party had been picked up and sent off to Bangor. Craig, the only member of the group apart from Ann Mullaly who was of middle-class origin, pulled out a precious copy of Stalin's *Problems of Leninism*. He had bought it in Collet's in the Charing Cross Road the summer before the war. Now that shop had been closed, along with most of the other secondhand bookshops in London. It was one of the marks of Jackson's England, this attack on secondhand bookshops. One day last summer an order had gone out that all books dealing with socialism, communism, liberalism 'and antifascism, together with other subversive creeds' were to be handed in to local authorities for burning. This had meant the end for Collet's and for other shops like it. Craig lit a pipe and settled back in his chair. The others in the room waited in their own fashion. Like passengers in a third-class railway carriage, Craig thought, they just stare out of the window and pretend to be busy with their own thoughts.





JUDITH looked out of the window of her flat in Albany Street, Regent's Park. Before the war, at this time, she would have been able to see the lights of Albert Terrace gleaming grandly, at right angles to her window and to the park. A lamp had stood halfway along the terrace, showing the Nash façade. Now all was dark. All she could see as she looked out was her own reflection in the window-pane. A dark, slim face. Good eyes. No make-up, at the moment. Obviously Jewish? She supposed so. But it did not seem to matter. It was curious how she, a Jewess, could really attract Germans. She looked at her watch. A quarter past seven. Strichner would not be with her for another half-hour. She went into her bedroom, hesitated, and dialled a telephone number.

'Allo?' said a voice, which she knew was not French, though it sounded like it.

'Oh,' she said, 'it's Judith.'

'Ah, Judith darling, where are you?'

'At home. I've got "you know who" coming for dinner.'

'For dinner? And how long will he stay?'

'Until he's told me everything. Where will you be?'

'You know where—come here immediately you discover what we want to know—any time—but, darling, be careful.'

'Of course. Goodbye.'

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'Cheers.' The editor-in-chief of the Twilight Press put down his receiver in his tiny office in Swan Court, Fleet Street.

'Curious, isn't it,' he said to his assistant, 'how certain women will do anything for us. Anything. Without any payment. For nothing. They will sacrifice everything. They will even sleep with a German if it can help us. They will even sleep with Strichner, who must be a bad lover. Difficult. Complicated. I would not like it. You know,' he added, 'I don't know that anyone else but an English Jewess could possibly do it. They are very good at this kind of thing. Their calm—their ruthlessness—their total concentration—remarkable.' The editor of the Twilight Press sipped his black market whisky, and returned to his typewriter.

6

‘I HAVE told you a hundred times, I am not interested. Whether the Germans murder fifty Englishmen, or the English fifty Germans, is a matter of profound indifference to me. I am not a patriot, and I have never been. I am a painter. What is more, I am a great painter. I tell you this because it is naturally difficult for you to realize it. I know that we are watching a tragedy. That is of interest to me purely and simply in so far as it gives the material for a work of art.’ The speaker was Jules Nott. The scene was his studio in Hampstead. He was talking to his beautiful wife who had come in to tell him that a corpse of a German officer was lying in the street outside. Jules Nott was a great giant of a man, with a beard like Hemingway’s and enormous pale-blue eyes. He got up from his stool, a palette knife in his hand. ‘Listen, I will tell you a story. It concerns Michelangelo. He was asked to paint a crucifixion for the Church of Santa Maria della Croce in Rome. The painting did not go well. He was unable to depict the depths of sufferings on the face of Christ. So what did he do? He summoned a porter. And he called for a spear. And he stabbed the porter in the breast to see what a man in agony looks like. You see the moral? I feel like that. It is the only way to feel as an artist. It is the only way that I can preserve my honesty. I paint for humanity, as Michelangelo did. I do not propose to turn myself into a

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poster painter. One day, who knows, I shall paint a great mural. It will be called the "Decline and Fall of the British Empire". When I am doing that work, which will be of truly Titanic proportions, you will see that I am really a man bursting with humanity and pity for all these things. But not till then. Until then, let me get on with my work. I have not been interrupted by the Germans. Nor have I been interrupted by the English. Both respect me. Which is surprising, as neither of them have the faintest inkling of an understanding of painting. They are primitive. Both of them. It is undoubtedly surprising that I exist. I am as surprising in England of the 1940s as Goya was in the Spain of the 1770s. That, Katia, is a subject you should investigate. Consider the phenomenon of Goya. Who could possibly have supposed that at that time in that crooked and primitive country there should suddenly appear a universal genius? Reflect on that. Forget that corpse outside. Forget the war. Forget these things. We have enough money to buy food from the black market. We have lighting, space, four fires in the house and three children. You look doubtful. Could it be that since luncheon there are more children? No, I thought not. Forget all these things, my dearest darling, and let us all get on with our work. Me with my paintings. You with your books.'

'You forget that since the war your painting has improved so greatly that you are unrecognizable. Don't you think that you owe something, even you, to the war?' Katia was cross. She felt anger surging up within her cheeks, almost overflowing. And her anger was increased by her knowledge that this very anger caused her to appear more exciting and therefore more desirable to possess. She caught a glimpse of

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herself in the huge mirror which stood on the floor. She was dressed rather smartly in a tailored suit, as if she had been going out to lunch before the war. This conventional dress looked especially well beneath her almost absurdly lovely face. But it irritated her at the same time since she felt that in some way it weakened her case.

‘Well, perhaps,’ replied Jules. ‘But that is not my fault. I am the reflector. It is my good fortune, I admit, that I live through a period of total collapse. But suppose that I were to do something about it? Suppose that I were to abandon my painting and take a part, a prominent part, in the Resistance? We should expel the invader. And we would return to what we were before. “Lobelias and cricket flannels.” Don Bradman our great hero. “The Lambeth Walk” our great musical achievement. That was what you wanted to preserve? Who cares? You’re quite right. I have been *made* by the defeat. This chaos which is surrounding us has given the English an honesty which they have never had. Look at all the poetry. It is very good. We don’t have any more of the prep school verse of Mr Auden. We have torrential epics in praise of liberty. Humanity, Katia, humanity is striding through our streets for the first time. Tragedy is a litmus paper. It shows what people are really like. Some of us are fighting, plotting, killing in dark passages. Some women allow themselves to be seduced by Germans. This is what we are really like, once the lobelia mask is taken from us.’

‘And the Jews?’

‘I ask you. What has happened to the Jews? They have been simply placed in a camp. They are not ill-treated as much there as they would have been if they were out. Besides, they

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are sharing the fate of their compatriots in Germany and elsewhere in Europe.'

'Don't you mind?'

'Oh God. Must I go on?'

They each stood indecisively looking at each other. Their mutual vacillation was interrupted by the appearance of their children's nanny. She was obviously in a state of distress. Since this was a comparatively frequent state for her to be in, Jules exclaimed: 'No, Nanny, not now. Later, for God's sake.'

'Beg pardon, sir,' she said; 'beg pardon, but it's the children.'

'Well, what have the children done?' asked Jules.

'Oh, sir. Oh, ma'am,' said the nanny. 'They've found a corpse. A corpse of a German officer.'

'Good God, Nanny,' exclaimed Jules; 'then for heaven's sake ask them to leave it alone.'

'Oh, sir, but it's too late. They've brought it in. It's in the kitchen.'

'Really, Nanny,' said Katia, assuming her primmest manner, 'how could you let them?'

'I really cannot understand it,' said Jules, affecting the role of the injured father.

'But, sir, that isn't the worst of it.'

'Not the worst? Good God. Let's have it all then, for God's sake. Bad news should always be spilled out at the same time. Good news can be allowed out in dribblets if you like. But not bad news. For God's sake, Nanny, tell us the worst.' Jules dug at his chin with his palette knife in his anxiety.

'Oh, sir,' said the nanny, stumbling over her words,

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'they're eating the German. Eating him on the kitchen table!'

Jules and Katia looked at each other.

'*Your* children are impossible,' they both said to each other furiously.

MICHAEL fired. A pale man of fifty had fallen to his knees, mortally wounded, on the steps of the Athenaeum. The bodyguard had been unable to detect from where the fatal shot had come and had responded by an aimless avalanche of machine-gun fire. Sirens from the armoured cars had been sounded to appeal for more police and Gestapo. Michael ran down his fire escape, across two roofs and dropped six feet into the courtyard behind Harvey's wineshop. He reached the foot of Duke of York Street before any possible pursuer had a chance to stop him leaving the immediate area of the crime. He did not know yet, of course, that he had killed Mr Gawthorp and not Sir Stanley.

He walked on fast towards Piccadilly, across it and into Albany, where he lived. There were no porters there nowadays and, as in St James's, the atmosphere was now one of extraordinary quiet. There was no sound of continuing gunfire, none of sirens. The only noise seemed to be that of the fog slowly thickening. He walked hastily along the broad walk, and mounted the stairs to his flat.

Then, locking the door, he made, as had been requested of him, a number of telephone calls. He spoke, as it seemed to him, to two working-class voices, two upper-class voices and two neutral. (One of the first of these was Beasley, of the Marylebone C.P.) This he suspected was the real class division

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in the Resistance. To each, he murmured the same codeword, 'Jarrow'. When he had done this, his whole being became suffused by a sense of satisfaction. The long days of indecision were over. No more would he have to reflect whether he might try and reach Canada *via* Ireland. Already, after his first mission, he felt deeply involved in the Resistance. The very word embraced him as if it were an experience which everyone would naturally pass through once in their lives. Home, School, the University, the Resistance, the thing seemed the natural next step. Already, it seemed as if another watershed was past. Another womb was opening itself to him. He drew a deep breath. Then he ran a bath and began to change for dinner.

The bath was already half full when he went into his kitchen and took a half-bottle of champagne from the refrigerator. Pouring it out he raised a glass to his reflection in the mirror. 'Thus,' he remarked aloud, 'thus perish all traitors.' Champagne, of course, was at this time not the easiest drink to come by. Mostly, as Michael knew, the Resistance drank beer. Hundreds of militants, that is, spent hours waiting about in dark pubs, drinking watery ale, passing strange codewords and referring to each other by aliases. Michael, however, had refused to take an alias. 'Michael' itself had, surprisingly, appealed to the strange, lurking, anonymous powers inside the movement. And he was now taking a drink upon which many of the Puritan leaders of the movement would have frowned. They might even have confiscated it. That is Resistance champagne, they might have said. Furthermore, Michael was that night proposing to dine actually in the enemies' camp. He was indeed about, at this moment, to set out for the house of Lady Stoll, the leading collaborationist hostess in London.

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This venture he had discussed, naturally, with his Resistance friends. They, surprisingly, rather favoured it. For Michael to appear in public as a collaborationist might be an excellent extra cover for him. He might discover a great deal about what was going on. No, there was no veto on a dinner with Lady Stoll—provided that a full report was made afterwards.

While the rest of the city counted themselves lucky if they saw horse-meat once a week, Lady Stoll's guests could be certain of red meat and red wine. While other society women of the days before the war had either gone to the country or at least lived very quietly, Lady Stoll had gone the whole hog and even occasionally entertained German officers. Lord Stoll was in Canada, a minor member of the Government-in-Exile. Lady Stoll, waited on by Irish servants and an Austrian cook, did very well in South Audley Street.

On this evening Michael was the last to arrive. Lady Stoll was waiting for him in the hall. She was a pretty woman of forty, full of energy and enthusiasm.

'Why are you so late?' she hissed at Michael.

'I was busy shootin' "collabos",' he remarked.

His hostess looked at him with annoyance. Really, this was no time for joking, she thought. But she had something far too good to say to be angry.

'I've got Hassel here,' she hissed.

'Really. I congratulate you. What a catch!'

'You think so?'

'Cynthia, my dear, who could not . . . ?'

'And you've heard the news?'

Michael listened expectantly.

'Gawthorp was shot dead this evening coming out of the Athenaeum. Really, it's too bad. They think they were

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trying for Stanley who was just behind. In the circumstances it's very good of Hassel to come, don't you think?' By now they were almost upstairs in Lady Stoll's drawing-room. From within Michael could hear the tumultuous noise of about half a dozen people talking at the tops of their voices. But what could the meaning of this allusion to Gawthorp be? Could it be that he had really shot the wrong man? What a fool, what a bloody fool he was!

Michael followed his hostess into the drawing-room with his self-assurance very much a-droop. There, unmistakably, was Field Marshal von Hassel, tall, elegant, monocled, in civilian dress, putting everyone at their ease. There were also present Sir Albert Rook, head of the Quisling Foreign Office, and Lady Rook. The other guests were Sir Alfred Liliburne, the race-horse owner, and his wife—into whose past no one dared closely look—and Mary Bright-Smith, one of the leading figures in the English woman's Fascist Party. With the disgrace of the Mosley group within a few weeks of the defeat, the Woman's Fascists had come to occupy an almost sacred place in the organization of English society. Michael knew everyone present except for Hassel. Everyone seemed already a little intoxicated. Rook was shouting his indignation at the Gawthorp murder to Liliburne. Mary Bright-Smith, a very large whisky in hand, was expostulating on the same matter to Lady Liliburne. Hassel, on the other hand, was speaking quietly of his youth in Bavaria to Lady Rook.

'Aha,' said Rook, on Michael's appearance, 'and what do you think? You—a publisher—what are your views? You agree with me—anyone rather than poor Gawthorp. Damn it all—what had poor Gawthorp done? I mean—kill me, kill

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the Prime Minister by all means—but Gawthorp. Good heavens, man, you don't mean to say you hadn't heard?'

For Michael had turned a shade of extreme white. There was no need for him to dissemble. This confirmation of the death of Gawthorp had caused him almost to faint with self-disgust and rage. What an incredible fool he was! What a complacent fool! And he had even broached his last half-bottle of champagne to celebrate—to celebrate the death of the ex-chief whip! Lady Stoll's other guests of course assumed that Michael's discomfiture was caused by pity and grief. They each crowded round him, pressing more and more champagne into his glass—for Lady Stoll had resolved to pull out all her reserves in honour of Hassel. Hassel himself did not share in this general concern. Instead, he turned to examine two small Dutch seventeenth-century seascapes on the wall over the sofa.

8

IMMEDIATELY Beasley heard from Paul the news of the shooting in Pall Mall, he said to the rest of the E.C., 'I have to report a disaster.'

'He missed,' exclaimed Edwards scornfully.

'On the contrary. He was successful. This means that the most sensational act of the Resistance was committed by one of the non-party members. I am afraid that they won't like that "at home" at all.' The expression 'at home' was the party slang for Moscow.

Everyone's faces dropped heavily as they realized that Beasley, with his usual realism, had hit upon a most important point. There was a long pause.

'Well, I suppose you want me to write and apologize,' said Beasley, mockingly, at last.

'It would still be possible for the party to take advantage of the incident, I suppose,' said Craig.

'How?'

'Either Michael becomes a member of the party. Or one of us allow ourselves to be captured and take the blame.'

'Those ideas were undoubtedly put forward by Comrade Craig in his usual spirit of compromise,' announced Beasley.

'The first of the alternatives would seem the least wasteful,' said Thomas.

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'Any suggestions, comrades, as to how Michael can be made a member of the party?'

No one answered. Michael had never seemed very promising material.

'There is only the latter alternative then?' said Beasley, allowing, however, a note of interrogation to come into his voice.

'Let us attempt the suborning of Michael first. He would be a useful member if we were successful—for a while at any event,' said Ann Mullaly.

'And would you, comrade, be ready to carry out this subornation?'

She shrugged her shoulders.

'If you like,' she said.

9

SIR STANLEY JACKSON dined alone with his family in Downing Street. His wife Mary had told their two daughters not under any circumstances to allude to the news that they had heard of the death of Gawthorp. Their chattering family conversation therefore was limited to trivial matters.

The Jacksons usually dined alone. They were a devoted family. The isolation of Sir Stanley in English political life had added to the feeling which he had for his children. Mary Jackson, on the other hand, had no doubt whatever that Sir Stanley was right in all his actions. She had been married twenty-two years. All that time she had been a politician's wife. She had always admired her husband's moderation, his Puritanism and his personal integrity. Like Mrs Beasley, she knew nothing of politics but by common intuition she thought that her husband had been right over India, over Manchuria, over the Rhineland, over non-intervention in Spain, over Munich, over the defeat. Surely, for example, we had been wrong to refuse dominion status to India in 1530, just as we had been right to refuse war over Spain. Who, after all, could really have wanted to fight over *Spain*? She believed wholeheartedly that Stanley had been right to offer to lead a Government of compromise after the defeat. She disliked the Germans, though she admired them a little for respecting her dislike and for not asking her to carry out too many functions.

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Their two daughters, Juliet and Sybil, were sixteen and thirteen respectively. The great crisis through which they were growing up could not dampen their incessant high spirits and their curiosity. But they were tactful whenever they saw their father. They went to a smart girls' school in Camden Hill and were treated deferentially by their school friends. The head-mistress, an out-and-out 'collabo', sucked up to them and pronounced herself a warm admirer of their father. Some of the other mistresses were more circumspect, but all were polite. Except for Miss Grady, the history mistress, who was, Juliet thought, a member of the Resistance. Juliet, who was still in the dreamy and poetic stage of uncertainty, was thinking of this over dinner, over the lamb chops. She and Sybil alone of the girls at St Mary's were eating such a substantial dinner. Of course, she reflected, it was possible that Miss Grady was simply a sour old maid, who was jealous of her and Sybil's splendid position in life, and who behaved so hostilely not because of her political feelings at all.

Suddenly, Sir Stanley remarked:

'Let us all go later to the theatre. It would be a pleasant change and a deserved one.'

'But surely . . . Stanley . . . surely . . . Gawthorp . . .' exclaimed Mary.

'Precisely. It would be a gesture. Juliet, could you kindly tell Warren?' Obediently Juliet got up and left the table. Warren was Sir Stanley's secretary, once one of Mosley's followers, now an adroit administrator. Warren would get tickets, alert the escort, arrange for security forces at the theatre.

The Jacksons chewed on at their dinner in silence till Juliet returned.

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'He asks,' she said, 'what play? There aren't that number of theatres still running.'

'Humph!' said Sir Stanley. 'I thought all actors were supposed to be—as it were—with us. However, what about *Perchance to Dream*?'

10

STRICHNER arrived at Judith's a little late. All day he had been thinking of this evening before him. It was his great moment. He was a small man, with spectacles. His life had hitherto been empty of romance. In his early youth, in the squalid back-streets of Berlin, there had been women. Yes, certainly there had been women. But never a Jewess. He was about to enter a forbidden territory. A Sudetenland of passion. How the Fuehrer would be angry. A small, dark Jewess, who was also a sculptor. He, chief of the Gestapo in Britain, with a Jewess. The prospect of what lay ahead had excited and distracted him all day at the Gestapo headquarters in Petty France. Then, suddenly, just as he was about to go home, and change, and take one of two pills which a Swiss doctor (also a Jew, as a matter of fact) had given him to keep him sexually up to the mark, that maddening Resistance had shot Gawthorp. This had delayed him no end. In fact he had not even had time to go home. Of course it did not matter very much about the change of address. But the pills . . .

He rang the bell in Albany Street. There was a long silence. Then he heard Judith tap-tapping her way downstairs with her high heels. She opened the door. 'I'm afraid it's the second floor,' she said, 'and there's no lift.'

'Ha ha,' Strichner said, 'that is of no importance.' He went on upstairs in silence following Judith. From the door

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of Judith's room a chink of light showed the way. Inside, the lights were low. Judith had left on the gramophone. Gently, it played a forgotten foxtrot of 1934. 'Yes, yes,' Strichner said again, 'it is enchanting. You are delightful.' Strichner remembered that Roehm had liked that tune, what a curious coincidence! He was silent, thinking back. Puzzled at her guest's silence, Judith wondered whether she was overdoing her seduction scene.

'Will you have a drink?' she asked.

'Yes, thank you, yes I will.' She poured him out some whisky.

'How clever you are to have got this!'

'There are ways and means, Herr Strichner.' She did not explain that Clarence Connolly had given the precious bottle to her.

'Please, do not let us be so formal. Can we not relax? Surely I apologize. I am still in my working clothes.' He apologized for his riding breeches and jackboots. 'But now, after all, we can surely take it easy.' He spoke English with the almost intolerably good accent of the slightly mocking, educated Indian. He took his whisky in his hand and walked up and down the room twice. A sudden lassitude seized him. For a second he became almost ashamed of his lust for the young Jewish sculptress. After all, what did such things really matter to him? Was he not, after all, Strichner, Gestapo chief in Britain and one of the six most powerful men of the Reich? At heart he was not greatly interested in these things of the body. At heart he was a theorist, concerned with the application of ideas to practice. Yet here he was, in a second-floor flat off Regent's Park with a pretty Jewess. Wearily almost he sat down in a chair and allowed himself to be overcome once

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again by his earlier dreams of pleasure. Judith meantime was watching anxiously. Not because she feared that Strichner might do her harm, but because she had sensed that his interest had partially evaporated. When he sat down, she was relieved. But she need not have worried; as she stood before him, he stretched out a hand and drew her greedily to him. Shuddering inwardly, she allowed him to kiss her.

'Ah, *liebchen*,' he murmured softly, himself surrendering to rapturous pleasure. She smiled up at him. These little Jewish eyes, he was thinking to himself, how the Fuehrer would boil with rage, or envy? Who knew? Poor Fuehrer. '*Liebchen*,' he whispered, 'will you do something for me?'

'Not now,' said Judith firmly. She disentangled herself from him. It was no good Strichner becoming amorous immediately he arrived. She would have no chance to find out what she wanted to know. She poured out another whisky for herself. 'Darling,' she said, when she got back to Strichner, 'tell me what you do with yourself all day. And while you are doing that I will cook us some dinner.'

II

Perchance to Dream had been running effortlessly at the Coliseum almost since the start of the Occupation. Silky, rosy, melodic, it was a great favourite with German soldiers. When Sir Stanley and his family arrived at the theatre five minutes before the curtain was due to rise, the Premier could not help considering himself somewhat more secure at the sight of so many of these efficient-looking soldiers in the foyer. It was, he knew, an appalling thought, but he felt the bolshevists of the Resistance would be hard put to it to emulate Booth's attack on Lincoln in this theatre. He, Mary, the two girls, Warren, his secretary and Inglis, his detective, were hustled quickly into a box on the dress-circle floor and nearest the stage. The expected gaggle of security men stood outside the plush door of the box. Sir Stanley waved to them as he arrived. His daughter Juliet was worried because they were sitting on the prompt side of the theatre, which she had gathered was the worst side for proper audition. Her sister Sybil, however, believed this point of view to be nonsense. The recriminations of the two girls continued as they took their seats.

The house was very full. About one-third of the audience were Germans. A large number of these sat with English girls. Sir Stanley nodded approvingly at the sight. He admired realism, and this attitude on behalf of the girls and also of the

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soldiers pleased him as realistic. His mind went back involuntarily to the time when he was a student in Germany living with a German family in Cologne. He saw the whole family again as if he had only just left them: there was the old doctor, with his spectacles over his forehead and *his* memories of Hegel lecturing in Berlin; there was the *Frau* doctor, with her enormous appetite, her quick intelligence, her silly giggle; and there was young Hans, who had been killed on the Marne, and Elisabeth, who had been so pretty and who had introduced him to the poems of Grillpärzer; and then there had been the old clock, dominating the overcrowded drawing-room, striking away the last years of the nineteenth century and of the old Germany. Sir Stanley, looking down, felt that the essence of the old Germany remained. 'Under a thin veil of modern assimilation, she still bears the classic garb unaltered.' He said this aloud.

'What's that, dear?' asked Mary.

'No, no,' he said. 'I was thinking aloud.'

'If you don't mind, sir,' said Inglis, the detective. He laid a restraining hand on Sir Stanley's arm.

'Well?'

'I must ask you to step back a little; we cannot afford, after all, a repetition of what happened this afternoon.'

Meantime, from below, a number of people had seen Sir Stanley arrive, and they had begun to clap. Sir Stanley, now standing well back in the cover of the box, raised his hand in discreet acknowledgement, but also to restrain the good people from too much demonstrativeness.

The play now began. The songs and romances flowed easily during the next three hours, like a soothing and therapeutic river, a river inculcating not merely forgetfulness but

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drowsy indolence. The German soldiers patted the arms of their English girl friends, the Prime Minister's party allowed their thoughts to drift, and even the security guards relaxed their attention.

In the first interval there was, however, an unexpected and unwelcome visitor for the Prime Minister. The news of the arrival was brought into the box by a security guard, passed to Inglis and by Inglis to Warren.

'Father Fairlie is here,' whispered Warren. 'He has something urgent to say. He refuses to go away. Quite honestly, I do not know how he has got to us. But, in the circumstances, I think perhaps it might be as well to see him. He has,' added the private secretary, 'been most carefully searched.'

'Searched, you don't mean it?'

'Of course, sir. Even the cloth is not above suspicion. Who knows but that the parish priest of St Cuthbert's might not turn out a Jacques Clément?'

Sir Stanley frowned. For many years he had been a devout attendant at services at St Cuthbert's in Westminster. Sometimes he would read lessons there. He had been instrumental in the gradual development of St Cuthbert's into one of the staunchest Anglo-Catholic parishes in the land. For the last ten years the priest in charge had been his close friend and counsellor, Wilfrid Fairlie. Father Fairlie was by no means typical of his brethren in the Anglo-Catholic communion. While many of them seemed pale and aesthetic Christians for whom the effort of swinging a censer appeared often excessive, Father Fairlie was gaunt, strong and uncompromising. He had been at one time chaplain at St Joseph's in Oxford, until his incessant polemical activities drove the college authorities into extracting from him a reluctant resignation. Everyone

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knew that he was the 'Anglican Priest' who had written the series of articles in the *Sunday News* at the time of the defeat arguing for negotiations. It had been he who, in defiance of the anglican hierarchy, had developed the theological arguments for the idea of collaboration. The Twilight Press had produced several pamphlets about his activities and his influence at Downing Street. And now, astonishingly, he had arrived unceremoniously at the Coliseum. Sir Stanley left his seat and went into the small room which lay behind the box—the room in which, on gala days, receptions would be held before and during the presentation of plays.

Father Fairlie was standing alone, with a harsh expression on his face, examining on the wall various prints of old performances and players at the Coliseum. Sir Stanley, who had insisted on going to see his old friend alone, made his entry so silently as to be unobserved.

'Well,' he said, placing his hand on Father Fairlie's shoulder, 'I hardly expected ever to see you here looking at theatre prints.'

'And I hardly expected *you* to be here either on such a day. Is it fitting,' the priest demanded, 'that you should celebrate the death of Gawthorp by attending a musical comedy? Are you not better advised than that? Though presumably those around you felt that there was no need to give advice of this kind—it is a matter upon which it might reasonably be supposed that you could make up your mind.'

'It was simply a gesture, my dear father, simply a gesture; and one of which poor Gawthorp would himself, I know, have approved.'

'Whether Gawthorp would have approved or not is of no importance. The personal feelings of the victim play no

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part in the matter. I simply tell you, sir, that it was not proper to have acted thus. It was not at all proper.'

Sir Stanley was annoyed. 'All our actions in these unhappy times are bound to be imperfect compromises. Can we hope to act rightly? I believe that all that is possible is to choose the action that will do the least harm.' He spoke calmly, like a man who is very weary of his role in history.

'The damage is done,' said Father Fairlie, appearing not to notice Sir Stanley's remarks, 'and the only advantage that I can see in the situation is that it has at least given me an opportunity of a talk with you on general matters, while trying to bring you to your senses in the particular and present case.'

Sir Stanley sighed. There had been a time when he had looked forward to such general discussions with Father Fairlie. They had helped greatly during the difficult years before the war. Father Fairlie's views on Manchuria, unemployment, the Rhineland, Spain and Munich had formed the basis of many of Sir Stanley's speeches and policies. There had been a time immediately after the defeat when nearly every post had brought an acute note from St Cuthbert's vicarage, with an apt quotation from Holy Writ, to give support to this or that policy. But now: how things had altered! Strange, thought Sir Stanley, how it was only when he was fighting to rid himself of Father Fairlie's influence that the Twilight Press, for example, began to speak of the 'baneful shadow of the cloth' at Downing Street. A quotation from Hegel floated idly into his mind, which he tried to adapt for the situation: 'the Owl of Minerva was beginning its flight after the shades of night had lifted'. But then, that would mean equating the goddess of Wisdom with the Twilight Press; which would never do.

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Father Fairlie was watching him.

'I am not here to scold,' he said, 'I am here to commiserate. I am not here to weep for what is done. I am here to give hope for what is to come.'

Sir Stanley caught himself wondering whether Father Fairlie had always spoken in the style of Christ. Since the Premier did not speak, Father Fairlie felt free to continue. 'I confess at the moment that I am not happy. I am anxious about our Church. While there continue a handful of godly and patriotic souls who stand with me, the episcopacy, the hierarchy, the mass of the priesthood stand aloof. The English Church has always conceived itself as a political Church. It was founded by our Sovereign Lady, Elizabeth (Sir Stanley recalled that Queen Elizabeth had founded St Joseph's, Oxford, and reflected that Father Fairlie was unconsciously slipping into the language of an after-dinner grace) it was founded by our Sovereign Lady, Elizabeth, to give spiritual sanction to the Government. It is a state Church, and has its responsibilities to the state as the state has to it. Thanks to you, in recent years the State has carried out its obligations most admirably towards it. But has it carried out its obligations towards the State? A thousand times no. Never since the Act of Uniformity has the Church of England acted in a way so hostile to the State authority. It does not even oppose it. It ignores it. Intellectually it is, in general, as *we* know, an intellectual slum. Now, let me tell you, I have evidence, incontrovertible evidence, that many country parsons are actually leaders of the Resistance. They do not merely justify their flock in joining those bolshevists—indeed, such an exercise would be theologically beyond them. No. My dear Prime Minister, they are reverting to what in many cases have

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always been their first loves. That is, a life of violence. After years of preaching sermons of an insipid lack of distinction which would seem incredible, they are returning to the playing fields of their youth, by taking part in the Resistance. The rugged parson has been for many years a figure of amusement in this country. Now he is able to undertake a more dangerous three-quarter play. There are rifles stored in vestries. There are bombs in organ-lofts.' He ended abruptly, pacing the room.

'What is your evidence for this?'

'Evidence which cannot be gainsaid. I have my sources of information which, I observe, are superior to those of the government. For I am assuming that you know nothing of all this.'

'We have heard stories to this effect,' said Sir Stanley, 'but we have no certain knowledge. It is all rumour. That is why,' he added with impatience, 'I asked you for your evidence.'

'There is only one thing to be done,' said Father Fairlie, leaning forward, and speaking in a low voice, 'only one thing from which I am confident that you will not, through any misguided feelings of sentiment, shrink. And that, my dear Prime Minister, is to carry out a thorough purge of the Church. You must establish a special Commission with special powers to dispossess all incumbents after hearing the evidence. You must dispatch this commission to hold hearing in all the counties of England and Wales. It must be in effect a Star Chamber court. Its president must be a man of dynamic energy, theologically impeccable and steadfast in the Faith. He must be tireless and a master of legal procedure.' He stopped, to give an opportunity to the Prime Minister to say

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that he knew no person with these requirements other than the present vicar of St Cuthbert's. But Sir Stanley was not to be rushed.

'I will reflect on the matter.'

'Do so, Prime Minister. I have no doubt in my own mind that you will reach the correct conclusion.'

Sir Stanley put out his hand to his old friend. This was the only way of indicating to him that the interview was at an end. Father Fairlie, however, needed no encouragement. He considered his task over at the Coliseum. He passed out through the security guards exuding a glow of self-satisfaction. The Prime Minister returned to his box thoughtfully. Warren, his secretary, watched him with alarm and anger. To think that the figure around whom all English fascists were forced to gather and to whom they had to give their allegiance was no more than an Anglo-Catholic liberal like Sir Stanley! To think that priests actually came to the theatre to carry out their beastly intrigues! As he stood back to allow Sir Stanley into the box, Warren laughed savagely to himself. Five years ago he had been in the streets, fighting communists and popular-front supporters at demonstrations. And now, almost alone of the old English fascists, he was in a powerful position. But he had been a great deal happier in the old days, out in the streets, before fascism became respectable, responsible and the ally of priests.

12

CONVERSATION never flagged at Lady Stoll's. In this, Michael, after his initial anger and surprise had evaporated, played as usual a main part. Hassel remained decorous and agreed with everyone. Rook, on the other hand, as invariably disagreed. Mary Bright-Smith had a handsome appetite. She was a heavy woman of administrative ability who would inevitably do well out of any war. It was hard to imagine her eating badly. She did some heavy talking during the latter part of the meal. Lady Stoll kept up a bright chatter throughout.

'Do you notice many differences, Field Marshal, between England as it is now and when you were here before the war?' she asked winningly. Turning to Michael, she explained, 'The Field Marshal was here for the Coronation, with Field Marshal Bloombury.'

'Blomberg, dear lady,' corrected Hassel, 'Blomberg. Oh yes, there are some changes, certainly.'

'Really, how strange, because I for my part would say life really is very much as ever. What would you say, Mary?'

'The improvement has been really quite out of all proportion,' said Mary Bright-Smith severely. 'I myself would not have thought it possible. I myself would not have thought that Britain would rally so absolutely as the

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"second white nation"—as, I think,' and here she smiled at Hassel, 'the Fuehrer once put it.'

'Isn't that odd?' said Cynthia Stoll. 'I would quite truthfully have thought that nothing whatever had altered.'

'Of course,' said Mary Bright-Smith, 'everything is still in a very primitive stage. Not every Jew by any means has been traced. But our women are very active and, by the end of the next six weeks, we should have almost complete lists. To be ready,' she added darkly, 'for any emergency.'

'One question which I should like to ask,' intervened Sir Alfred Liliburne, brushing his moustache with his table napkin, 'is how your people have been able to make positive reports (as opposed to negative ones) on the infiltration of Jewish blood into the aristocracy. I know that's a difficult question. We have found the same difficulties with race-horses. Still, I'd like to know your views as of now. And so would my wife. Wouldn't you, Iris?' Iris nodded. She dared do nothing else.

'As to that,' answered Mary Bright-Smith, 'there's a very special group looking at this moment into it.' Michael had a mental picture of a number of middle-aged women looking into a huge cauldron slowly boiling out drops of Jewish blood, and registering this on a large nearby temperature chart.

Field Marshal Hassel clearly found this conversation distasteful. He turned to Iris Liliburne (sitting between him and Michael) and said: 'It would be interesting to me to know when the English went wrong. When was it that all these terrible things began? When do you date your decline—that decline,' he added hastily, feeling the disapproving eyes

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of Mary Bright-Smith upon him, 'from which you are now making so remarkable a recovery?'

'Oh, I'd put it in 1861,' said Sir Alfred, 'when the death of Prince Albert removed the guiding hand of a German from the conduct of our affairs.'

'My dear fellow, I wouldn't go so far as that. I'd name it 1899,' said Sir Albert, 'the year when we missed the opportunity of a German alliance. If Joe Chamberlain had been able to carry out his plans we should have been spared all the troubles of the century.'

'But also the opportunity of Mary's Renaissance,' put in Michael, desiring to show good-will.

To his surprise, Mary Bright-Smith did not seem very pleased at this.

'What do you think, Mary dear?' asked Cynthia Stoll.

'I am waiting,' was the reply, 'till I have heard everyone's point of view. Then I shall tell you which of you is right.'

'Oh well, then,' said Cynthia Stoll, 'I'd say the death of Queen Elizabeth. I really honestly don't think we've looked up once since then. What do you say, Michael?'

'I wouldn't put it as early as that,' said Michael seriously. 'I'd give 1838 as the proper date.'

'My dear! What could possibly give you such a modern idea?'

'Youth, youth,' said Sir Alfred jovially, 'how pleasant to have so short a memory.'

'Why 1838?' asked Field Marshal Hassel.

'Because any honourable nation would have approved the *Anschluss*. Instead, we did nothing.' A certain pause greeted this remark. Since Michael maintained a deadly serious

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face, no one ventured to suggest that he was mocking them. Still . . .

'I suppose that is true really?' said Sir Alfred thoughtfully, stroking his chin.

'We were absolutely hamstrung at the Office at that time,' said Sir Albert Rook, 'I was then only a rather small boy. I tried hard. I did my very best. But you know. We were up against some very difficult people at that time. Take Vansittart, for example.'

'Yes, take Vansittart,' said Sir Alfred Liliburne.

There was another pause. Everyone looked at Iris Liliburne, expecting her to make her contribution to this analysis. But she remained silent, blushing, engrossed in her ice-cream.

'Well, Mary?' asked Sir Alfred Liliburne, after he had enjoyed his wife's embarrassment.

'You are all wrong,' said Mary Bright-Smith, 'the original moment of decline was a very long time ago. We can trace a continuous decadence since a very early period of our history. What you must realize is that in the lives of any nation there are certain climaxes, as in the life of a human being. Organically, a nation naturally has its ups and downs. Its times of frenzy, hysteria, orgasm, quiescence, sleep. But the moment of decline undoubtedly began in the year 1066. It was then that the Romance blood began to sap the potency of our Saxon ancestors. Historians have gauged that before 1066 the average Englishman was .75 more potent than after that date. It was for this reason that our women researchers are investigating not only those with Jewish blood in their veins, but also those who trace their descent from Huguenots, Italians, Normans and others. Let us never forget the fate of Portugal. There, a conquering nation was similarly reduced to impotence by

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breeding with the natives of the countries they colonized. Thus, we must inspect the blood groups of all women who have ever been to India. And all their descendants. Our work will be long. It will be carried out with great devotion by the now nearly a quarter of a million members of the English women's Nazi Party. Who can doubt that at the end of the process we shall have a nation purged of Romance, Jewish and coloured blood? It will be a nation well fitted for the problems of the second half of the twentieth century.' Mary Bright-Smith sat back on her chair, smiled warmly at everyone at the table and drained her glass to its dregs.

This seemed a proper moment for Cynthia Stoll to take away the ladies. As a gesture, she asked Hassel to sit at the top of the table. He agreed, with his customary graciousness. Michael found himself sitting next to the German. For once his loquacity deserted him. From down the table he could hear vague and general remarks being executed by Rook and Liliburne.

'There's no doubt the Church has behaved badly.'

'From the start.'

'Yes, there's no doubt the Church has behaved badly from the start.'

'Man in the Jockey Club told me the Archbishop of York is the head of the Resistance in the East Riding.'

'Scandalous. Hand in glove with murderers.'

'Hand in glove with communists and murderers.'

'Then there's *The Times*.'

'Yes, I'd have said we'd have been sure of the old *Times*.'

'Who'd have thought it? In the old days Dawson was with us up to the hilt.'

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'What made him crack, d'yer think?'

'What makes anyone crack? My dear Sir Alfred . . .'

'My dear Sir Albert . . .'

'Some port?' Michael became aware that Field Marshal von Hassel was looking at him enquiringly.

'Yes, well, thank you.'

'I am told,' said the field marshal, 'that you are a publisher.'

'Indeed, after a fashion.'

'General publishing?'

'General publishing.'

'I wonder. I have a young friend. An Englishman. A clever young man. A poet. He has written some remarkably good verse. Somewhat in the German manner, perhaps. But then,' the field marshal smiled charmingly, 'but then I believe that that is all the fashion. Would you perhaps be interested to see some of his work?'

'Yes, Field Marshal, do ask him to send some of it along to me. Could you tell him to mark it "personal"?''

'There is no need. I have some of it here.' The field marshal plunged his hand into his inside pocket. While he searched Michael heard Rook and Liliburne agreeing with each other furiously.

'Of course, they can't try our patience much longer.'

'They certainly can't try our patience a moment longer.'

'I'd have the whole lot put inside tomorrow and no questions asked. Man in the Berkeley told me they think Gawthorp's killer was a communist canon.'

'Very likely, my dear Sir Albert. . . .'

'I'm afraid so, Sir Alfred. . . .'

'Here they are now,' said the field marshal to Michael,

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handing over two notebooks. Michael opened the first to find the inscription: 'Fritz from Henry.'

'He calls me Fritz always,' said the field marshal. 'His name is Henry.'

'Well, Field Marshal, I'll certainly look most carefully at them . . .'

'I may flatter myself,' said the field marshal, 'but I think that I may perhaps have helped in his development.'

'I am sure that you have, Field Marshal. As I say, I'll look at them most carefully.'

'It must be so interesting to be in your position,' said Hassel, 'to observe the first flights of a young talent such as—well, for example, such as Henry's. To watch it grow, mature and flower into a mature genius.'

'I would not change my profession for another,' Michael remarked pompously.

'Yet soldiering is not without interest, not without its satisfaction.' The field marshal laughed like a child. 'There is comradeship. There is loyalty. There is travel. After all, I have been, in the last ten years, in many countries. Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, France and now England. I have visited Russia and also Tokyo. I ask you—what diplomat has had a more varied life than mine? Is there not a song—I recall it, an English song, from one of your elaborate musicals. I saw it when I was here with Field Marshal Blomberg for the Coronation. It was called *Follow the Fleet*. Perhaps you saw it? No? Well, the song went like this: "I joined the navy to see the world. But what did I see? I saw the sea."' The field marshal got to his feet, and began to sing, at first softly and sadly, and then more loudly:

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'I saw the Atlantic and the Pacific,
But the Pacific wasn't terrific,
And the Atlantic wasn't gigantic
And the Mediterranean wasn't what it
Was made out to be. . . .'

'Ah ah ah ah,' exclaimed Sir Alfred Liliburne. 'Bravo, bravo, bravo.'

Sir Albert Rook clapped his hands, though evidently disapproving. Michael smiled, and clapped also. The field marshal sat down again, and laughed loudly. He placed his hand on Michael's arm.

'You see—an old Prussian can still be a good companion!'

'I should think so, Field Marshal,' said Sir Alfred Liliburne.

'Shall we join the ladies, gentlemen?' suggested the field marshal, obviously delighted with himself.

They all trooped out, a feeling of well-being pervading them and their surroundings. As they reached the drawing-room, however, there was a terrible explosion. A bomb had been thrown in from the street through the window of the downstairs lavatory. The whole of that side of Lady Stoll's house was destroyed. Had the gentlemen lingered a second longer in the dining-room they would have all been killed amid a mass of dishes and glasses. As it was, they were flung to the floor and suffered several minor injuries. 'That bloody Resistance,' Michael thought to himself. 'Why, if they had been slightly more accurate in timing, they would have blown up me, their own most valuable marksman.' Lady Stoll and the ladies emerged uninjured.

'How very unfortunate,' she said, 'and just when the field marshal was in the house too.'

13

EVENTS in Hampstead meantime had been pursuing a peculiarly complicated course. Jules and Katia, having heard of their children's extraordinary meal, had gone immediately downstairs to do at least something. When they reached the nursery, however, the three little boys were sitting demurely on their chairs.

'Where is that German?' Jules demanded.

'Which German, Daddy?'

'Your German, damn it. The German you unwisely brought in from the road.'

'We ~~did~~ didn't bring in any German, Daddy.'

'Katia, how dare you produce such children for me? Children who do not tell the truth at any moment of any day. Children who do not know the meaning of truth.'

'Cosmo, where is the German? You must realize that this is very serious. You can get yourself into prison or into every sort of difficulty if you persist in this. You might get Mummy and Daddy into even worse difficulties. They might be shot. In fact, if the German is found here they are almost certain to be shot. So please tell us where you have put him. Mummy and Daddy aren't blaming you for anything. We just want you to help us.'

But even this firm plea failed to elicit any information from the children. Jules and Katia looked at each other, each

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blaming each other, but each seeking each other's help in the difficulty.

'We had better see each of them separately,' Jules said.

'If you took more notice of your children this sort of thing would never happen.' Katia was becoming really angry now, a rare mood with her, but one of which Jules had good reason to be afraid. They both went into the hall, leaving the children triumphant in the nursery. There they faced each other.

'We must just look for the body, that's all. After all, it can't be very far. And we can get Nanny to help. And Mrs Carpenter,' Jules said, trying to be reasonable.

'Fool. That would be the worst thing of all. Mrs Carpenter will be bound to talk about it everywhere. We must keep this absolutely to ourselves as much as possible.'

'People will have seen the children bringing in the thing, anyway,' said Jules.

'With any luck they will have looked the other way,' said Katia.

'But they are surely no more likely to look the other way as, say, Mrs Carpenter,' Jules meekly said.

The artist was now longing for an abatement of the crisis, longing for some way of securing his swift return to the studio. Alas! He could see no means of doing so. As he spoke, furthermore, there was a ring at the front door.

'The Germans,' said Katia, with intuitive gloom. She made a move to answer the door.

'No, for God's sake, what's Mrs Carpenter here for? She can open the bloody door. I'm going back to the studio.'

'Suppose they find the German? The children must tell me where it is. They really must.' Katia went back into the

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nursery. Then she paused and looked back. 'They couldn't really have eaten it all.'

'How should I know?' asked the artist with dignity. Then he said, 'Anyway, we don't know that it is the Germans.' As he spoke the ringing on the door was repeated insistently. Mrs Carpenter came up from the kitchen.

'We're very short of budgie seed,' said she to Jules, as she made her way to the front door. 'Very short indeed.'

'Well, why tell me? They're not my budgerigars. They're yours, Mrs Carpenter, they're yours.'

'They're members of the household, Mr Nott; they're members of the household same as me. If they go, I go, and that's all there is to it. So if you were to see modom, perhaps you could inform her of the lack of budgie seed. I know it's hard to get, but still, it's worth it.' The ringing on the door was now accompanied by prolonged knocking.

'Oh, for God's sake go and open that door. And if anyone wants me, Mrs Carpenter, say you think I'm upstairs in the studio.' With that Jules returned upstairs and slammed the studio door behind him just as Mrs Carpenter unbolted the front door.

Five minutes later he heard voices approaching. Mrs Carpenter, budgerigars forgotten, entered the room.

'There's two German gentlemen, sir,' she said. 'They've come looking for a *body*, sir.'

'Oh, thank you, Mrs Carpenter,' said Jules, 'show them in.'

And two very fair young men entered. They both bowed in a military fashion, and Jules Nott, his paint-brush in hand, pointed to two chairs.

'Good evening, Mr Nott,' said the spokesman. 'We are police officers.'

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'Guten abend. Ich spreche deutsch. Ich etwas viele Jahre in Berlin. Mein deutsch is nicht so schlecht.' Jules was very proud of his languages. The two young men immediately smiled. And the conversation, so propitiously begun, continued in German.

'We are looking for a German officer,' began the first German, 'he was visiting this road. He came alone, without escort.'

'A mistake surely, if not a breach of regulations?' intervened Jules Nott.

'Maybe it was a mistake. That is of no importance for the time being. Unfortunately, he was killed.'

'Killed!' Jules expressed alarm.

'Yes, killed. He was shot down in the street only an hour ago. Several people saw him.'

'Oh, really. But I fail to see how that concerns me.'

With great politeness, the young German replied: 'Oh, but, Mr Nott, forgive me, but it does. You see, some of your neighbours saw some people taking the body into your house.'

The neighbours! Jules Nott felt a spasm of anger seething through him. The neighbours! But he replied:

'Oh, I'm afraid that's quite ridiculous. You know what neighbours are. They get things wrong always. They have certainly made a mistake here.'

'I'm afraid not, Mr Nott. Much though we respect your artistic integrity, we have been obliged to conclude that these, how do you say, "busy-bodies", are for once correct. For we have seen the tracks of a body being drawn from the road into your house. Please, Mr Nott, will you tell us where the body is? If not, we shall be obliged, I am afraid, to take you into

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custody. And perhaps also your wife and children. If only you will tell us. Then everything will be all right.'

'Really, I cannot tell you something which I don't know.' Jules silently cursed his children, his marriage, and all domestic things. He got up. 'Really, perhaps we had better have a look for the body.'

'There are some people already doing that, Mr Nott.'

Jules Nott was surprised that the Germans behaved exactly like ordinary policemen.

'Well, I hope they find it, then,' he said. 'And now in the meantime, may I perhaps be permitted to continue with my work?'

'I'm afraid that would be impossible, Mr Nott. I'm afraid we shall have to ask you to come with us to our headquarters.'

'But that is preposterous. I have not finished my picture. I have done nothing. No one has done anything.'

Two other Germans now came into the room. One bent over to make his report to the leader of the search-party. The latter frowned.

'It appears, Mr Nott, that there is no sign of any body.' Jules nodded understandingly. He wondered to himself what the children could really have done with the body. They could not, surely, have eaten it all? Three little boys with even a very great appetite would surely be unable to boil up a whole German. Perhaps, in fact, the body was in little bits somewhere, perhaps in saucepans. He smiled at the thought of it. How Goya would have relished the scene!

'You smile, Mr Nott?' A German was looking at him with renewed suspicion.

'I was just feeling pleased that you were unable to find the body in my house.'

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'I see. Perhaps you will be less pleased when you have found yourself in front of Herr Strichner, the personal representative here of Herr Himmler. Friedrich,' he turned to his aide, 'be good enough to tell the household that they must consider themselves under house arrest. For the time being they may remain here. Mr Nott will, however, be accompanying us.'

Downstairs in the kitchen, Nanny, Katia and Mrs Carpenter were busy preparing what appeared to be a Lancashire hotpot when the German search-party made their last look round. The last of the searchers, who spoke a little English, said, as he went out, to his colleagues: 'A house which can eat as well as this is not so likely to be sympathetic to the Resistance. The black market has a good customer here.'

14

THE evening at Albany Street had progressed slowly. Strichner had drunk a great deal. Judith had been forced to drink more than she usually did in order to keep up with him. He talked extravagantly about his day-to-day activities, about his subordinates, about his relations with the Fuehrer.

'Of course,' he said, 'we have been very moderate towards the English. Compare what we have done in Poland, in France. Everywhere else. And you will see that what we have done here is nothing in comparison. Nothing. Yet let me tell you. Between these four walls let me tell you. The Fuehrer's patience is nearly exhausted. He has been remarkably understanding with Britain. But are the British co-operating? They are not.' He got up and walked up and down the room. 'I repeat—they are not. Every day there is an act of violence. Every day an attack on a German soldier. Every day—like today—an attempt on a leading British friend of Germany. Let me tell you, there are two Britains—the bolshevists—and those who, like you, my little black shirt, are wise enough to see the way their country should tread. The first group—masons, Jews, communists—it is them whom we shall exterminate. And we can only do so if we have the help of the latter group. The help of people such as yourself. We need you. The future of Nazi civilization needs you.' He placed a

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hand on Judith's knee. He stopped. '*Liebchen*, will you do now what I shall ask of you?'

Now for it, thought Judith. What is it going to be? She nodded, all the same.

'Do you see my military overcoat?'

She nodded.

'Take it,' he said, speaking suddenly fast, 'go into your room. Put it on. Take these riding boots.' He kicked them off as quickly as he could with a terrible feverishness. 'Put them on also. Dress yourself as a Prussian officer, my little Jewess. Put your hand in the pocket of the overcoat. Take out what you find there. Then do as I tell you. Go. I shall come in in five minutes.'

Judith did as she was bid. She glanced at the clock. Ten past ten. She went into her bedroom, and put on Strichner's boots. They were a little sweaty, but they fitted her remarkably well. Inside the pocket of the overcoat was a leather strap. It was as she expected. She went to a wardrobe and put on an ATS hat which she had had during the last stages of the fighting in England. Doing up the coat, she glanced at herself in the mirror. She did indeed look like a Prussian officer. Strichner began to crawl into the room on all fours. A wave of disgust passed through Judith.

'Now?' she nevertheless breathed.

Strichner nodded.

The disgust gave way to a hatred for Strichner and all he stood for which was so strong as to be overpowering. So encouraged, she began to whip the chief of Gestapo in England to within an inch of his life. 'Ah, *liebchen, liebchen*,' he cried in an ecstasy of pain.

Whether in fact Judith would have killed Strichner is

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uncertain. Before the matter was put to the test the telephone rang. Judith supposed that it was merely Clarence. When she lifted the receiver, however, still breathless from her exertions, it turned out to be the Gestapo.

'For you,' she said simply to Strichner.

'For me? But I gave very especial instructions that we were not to be disturbed.' He took the receiver.

'We have arrested a well-known artist,' said a complacent voice at the other end of the telephone. 'He is waiting here for questioning, Herr Reichmarschall. When can we expect you to arrive?'

'Immediately.' Strichner put down the receiver. He did not bother to ask who the artist was. For him, it was enough that an arrest had been made.

'Duty,' he said to Judith, 'is calling me away.'

'Do you want your boots then?'

'Of course,' said Strichner.

'Then, *liebchen*,' she said, 'you must buy me some of my own. For next time you come.' She purred into his ear, and returned the boots.

'Ah yes,' his face assuming an already excited expression, 'for next time.'

15

MICHAEL returned furious to the Albany; first, of course, because of his mistake over Gawthorp; secondly, against whoever it was—and he presumed it must be someone in the Resistance—who had thrown the bomb into Cynthia Stoll's house. It was typical, he reflected, of an organization so ill-led, so confused, that he, the best shot in the movement, should narrowly escape death at the hands of one of his own side. The whole question seemed absolutely incredible to him, and he proposed to make a considerable fuss about it at the highest level. At the very highest level. He intended to secure a hearing from the supreme council of the Resistance and to demand an official enquiry. Privately, he felt he would enjoy this series of complaints, since it would bring him in contact with the people at the top of the Resistance, and perhaps afford him an opportunity to join them. For, as Michael had discovered with surprise during the past few days, even hours, he had become ambitious.

In this state of mind, he arrived back in the Albany. As he put his key into his lock, he found himself reciting the words of protest which he would pronounce before the commission of enquiry . . . 'preposterous lack of forethought . . . not acting in my own interest but in that of all other members of the movement . . . such things could not but have a grave effect on morale. . . .' He was so taken up with his

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commission that he was hardly even surprised to find sitting on the sofa before the gas-fire the formidable figure of Ann Mullaly, from the Marylebone Communist Party. Michael had never seen her before, but he nevertheless noted with approval the spare firmness of her body, the strength evident in her arms and the self-possession and even obstinacy in her fine if neglected face.

'Who the hell are you?' he asked amiably.

'I am Ann Mullaly,' she said firmly. 'I am from Martin.' Martin was the code-name for the group of Resistance leaders from whom Michael received his orders; one of those who made up the composite personality of Martin was Ron Beasley.

'Oh yes,' said Michael, still thinking about his commission. 'You had better have a drink then.'

'Thank you, I don't drink in wartime.'

'You don't mind if I do?'

'Not at all. From what I hear you've had a good day.'

'You hear wrong,' Michael poured himself out a glass of whisky. 'Black-market liquor, I am afraid. But there. What can one do?' And within five minutes he had described to Ann Mullaly all his misfortunes. She listened astonished at his freedom in speaking to her. Her short experience as a communist had made her already inaccessibly secretive. To listen to Michael was like hearing a fresh wind blowing round an over-heated house. She had not known that the attempt on Jackson had merely caused the death of Gawthorp, nor that an attempt had been made on the life of von Hassel. It might have been thought that the former news should have made her ask for new instructions from the party, since her aim in drawing Michael into the party was linked with the supposed death of Jackson. However, she did not interpret

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her instructions in this way. She assumed, correctly, that the death of Gawthorp would, though less important, nevertheless be almost as great a feather in the party's cap as that of Jackson. She had also been persuaded, from her brief sight of Michael, that he would anyway be a desirable and, more important, a possible convert to the party.

Her method of approach to Michael was comparatively blunt.

'Is this the first time that you have been appalled by the incoherence inside the movement?' she asked.

Michael replied that incompetence within the Resistance had amazed him from the start of his association with it and that it was only his unquenchable patriotism which had made him continue with the movement at all.

'What do you think can be done to improve the movement's organization?'

'It should be run like an army, of course. You need a certain number of men who act full time, who are paid by the organization, who are not just amateurs. They will have at their disposal various people whom they may call on from time to time, in special emergencies, and in the final stages of the liberation. But otherwise—there should be fewer amateurs, more full-time militants.'

'There is, of course, one branch of the movement which is already organized in this way.'

'What is that?'

'The Communist Party is made up of precisely that combination.'

'That is one of the reasons I admire them. I am no communist, of course, I don't think much of their economic theories, I don't know that Stalin is much advance on Hitler. However,

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if you are fighting a war, you can't be choosy. I think you must have discipline and a professional army of the Resistance.'

'Those are the present slogans of the Communist Party,' said Ann Mullaly.

'What?' Michael laughed, thinking that he had independently reached the same conclusion as the communists. 'In those words?'

'Discipline and a single command,' said Ann Mullaly primly, 'are the precise words which the party uses.'

'Capital, capital,' said Michael. Then he paused, and asked, 'Are you by any chance a member of the party?'

'Certainly,' said Ann Mullaly, 'though I do not think that military reasons are the ones for joining.'

'What could be a better reason?' asked Michael.

'One joins the Communist Party after the most careful self-examination and course of study,' said Ann Mullaly. 'It is not just like joining the MCC.' Although conscious that, by some extraordinary trick in the development of the conversation, she was now trying to restrain Michael from joining the party rather than attempting to persuade him to do so, she was nevertheless shocked at the ease with which Michael had moved his ground. She thought almost with nostalgia of her gradual progress from moderate liberalism to democratic socialism and to her slow love affair with the party itself—her conversation with friends in the Hampstead Communist Party just before the defeat, her sudden blinding realization on the road to Marlowe (my 'road to Damascus', she called it) of the *inevitability* of communism, of her relief at finding herself accepted, of her mystical sensation of being beyond good and evil—all those old milestones crowded quickly into view. And now here was Michael skipping all

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the stages, all the anguish, as if he wanted to join a club for the duration of the war—while his own was closed—due to enemy action. But part of her also admired Michael for his simplicity, his directness, even his opportunism.

‘Well?’ he was saying.

‘Well what?’

‘Well, what are you going to do about me? Are you going to let me into your party?’

Really, she thought, the conversation is ridiculous. She blushed afterwards at the thought of it.

‘Let me let you into a secret,’ Michael was saying, standing with his hand casually clutching the heavy curtains. ‘I wasn’t really telling you all I thought just now.’

‘When do you mean?’

‘When I was saying that I didn’t approve of communist economic theories. One thing is clear. Things will have to be different after the war. I mean, things will simply have to be different. We can’t have all that unemployment for one thing. We shall have to have a new order of things. In many ways we shall have to change. I quite see that.’

‘What has led you to think like this?’

‘Oh,’ Michael considered, ‘many things. I mean, there’s no point in going into them now, is there?’

‘We have all night.’

‘But then you don’t really want to hear my very unoriginal views?’

‘I should like it,’ said Ann Mullaly.

‘Well then,’ said Michael, sitting down before her. He thought for a moment, and cleared his throat. But at this moment the telephone rang. They looked at each other, both with a sense of disappointment. Michael got up to answer it.

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'Who is it?' asked Ann Mullaly.

'How should I know? I'm expecting no calls. And it's late.' He looked at his watch. 'It's nearly midnight. Shall I let it ring?'

'Of course not,' said Ann Mullaly, shocked at the idea. 'Besides, it may be for me.'

'For you?' For the first time Michael stopped to think that he had no idea at all how this girl had got into his apartment. She said that she had come from Martin. But then he had not checked this by any counter-question or countersign. And he had proceeded to talk about all his innermost thoughts. He frowned, but picked up the receiver.

'Comrade Mullaly?' A loud and jovial voice with an air of complete certainty that he had the right number. Since the telephonist had spoken so loud, there was no need for Michael to ask Ann if she answered to that name. She got up and took the receiver.

'Mullaly speaking,' she said firmly.

Once again the voice on the other end of the line sounded so strongly that this time Michael could hear everything that was said, although, like a well-brought-up Englishman, he had studiously moved over to the other side of the room. 'Ah, Comrade Mullaly, Twilight Press calling. Immediate conference needed. Bring Michael with you. Meet us at the back of the Law Courts—Carey Street—quite, the bankruptcy courts—appropriate—meet us outside the bankruptcy courts—we shall direct you from there—we shall be represented by a funny little dark man in a cloth cap—he will have a white feather in his buttonhole—you can't miss him—nice little man—we call him Felix—totally trustworthy—goodbye.'

'Did you hear all that?' Ann Mullaly asked Michael.

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'Yes, but we can't go out now. I mean—it's much too late—we'd be stopped—besides, I'm exhausted.' Certainly he looked tired, thought Ann Mullaly.

'Come on,' she said. 'One thing about the Twilight Press is that you'll get a drink.'

'But what do they want?'

'How do I know?' she asked. Then she added, 'You'll have to turn up at odder meetings than this if you are to be a member of the party.'

16

THE arrest of her husband filled Katia Nott with every kind of marital devotion. Left alone with Mrs Carpenter, Nanny and the three children, she busied herself with the total elimination of the body of the German. This done, she went up to the studio and looked down into the street to see how far her house arrest had been secured by actual vigilance. Not finding anyone visible in the dark street (despite the moonlight) she went downstairs, swathed herself in a black cloak and a shawl over her head and silently but decisively left the house by the back door, taking with her her three children—carrying the youngest and holding the middle one by his hand. The eldest walked quietly by himself. She had spoken not a word of admonition to the three of them. What were their thoughts? Dark, conspiratorial, childlike thoughts all of their own, immersed in private dreams and satisfactions, through which the recollection ‘I have eaten a German’ hummed like a mad refrain in a bad pantomime.

Katia walked fast, and the two children had difficulty in keeping up with her.

‘Where are we going?’ asked the eldest child, Cosmo.

‘Don’t ask questions. You’ll find out soon enough.’

‘Where have they taken Daddy?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘When will we see him again?’

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'I have no idea.'

'Are you very cross?'

'No, do I seem to be?'

Cosmo hesitated. 'No, but . . .'

'Then don't ask silly questions. Keep your energy for walking. We've a long way to go.'

They had. They were walking, so far as Cosmo could see, to London.

After another half-hour they reached the top of Hampstead Road. Here the second of the children began to cry and say that he was tired. Without a moment's hesitation she lifted the little boy up into her arms with the other one. Cosmo observed this with admiration.

'Who goes there?'

A harsh cry rang out across the empty street. Katia saw two heavy forms moving towards her. She pulled her shawl further over her face, and answered, 'Who is it that asks?'

Two SS men came up to her.

'Where are you going, madam?'

'To the Globe Theatre,' said Katia, without batting an eyelid.

'At this time of night?'

'There is a midnight matinée of a play in which I am performing the main part in honour of Field Marshal von Hassel,' Katia said without hesitation. She allowed her shawl to drop back over her shoulders, disclosing her superb head. The two Germans goggled at her. They saluted and went on their way. So did Katia on hers. Eventually, after walking nearly an hour, they arrived in Bloomsbury. Katia rang the bell of a large house in Bloomsbury Square.

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'Who's there?' came a hoarse voice from the first floor.

'It is I, Katia.'

'Katia?'

The curtains were parted. A woman with long hair looked out. Seeing Katia, she came downstairs as quickly as she could.

'Well, Katia, what brings you here?'

This was Maria Strachey, renowned as a central figure of the Bloomsbury group, and now one of the leading Resistance workers. She had been very friendly with Jules and Katia before the war. But, recently, she had been very critical of the uncommitted attitude Jules had taken up towards the Occupation, and their friendship had lapsed. For this reason she did not immediately invite Katia and her children into her house.

'I want the address of the Twilight Press. Jules was arrested two hours ago. I want a world-wide protest against this outrage.'

'Come in, Katia,' said Maria Strachey.

They went upstairs. Maria insisted that the three children should be put in a bedroom. She gave Katia a drink. 'My dear,' said Maria Strachey, 'now if it is really the Twilight Press that you want, here's the address. Three, Swan's Court. But you know of course that they're not absolutely reliable. Lionel and I (Lionel was her husband) are going to start our own secret printing press shortly. We found the Twilight people too vulgar, too sensational. We shall not of course publish a paper. Just pamphlets and books. Already we have a great deal of support from those who think as we do about the Twilight Press. However,' she paused, 'I would not want to stop you from taking your news there tonight. That is

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clearly where it belongs. One thing. Let the children stay here. They will be quite safe. Good luck, my dear. You are becoming one of us after all.'

Katia went on by foot to Swan's Court.

17

THE Twilight Press had had many headquarters since it began, eighteen months previously, under the shadow of defeat. There had been a time when it had operated from over a well-known hat-shop in St James's, another when it had been established in Hampstead. However, for the past four months, it had been based in the area of Fleet Street or the Law Courts, though even in that time it had changed offices comparatively often. Throughout all its moves, however, the Twilight Press had been dominated and driven by the ebullient figure of Clarence Connolly. With his enormous spectacles, his ancient brown suit, his extraordinary nose for information, his apparently charmed life in relation to possible capture, his unfailing good humour and inexhaustible store of anecdotes, Clarence Connolly was, for many people, the very centre of the Resistance. Before the war he had been for a time a foreign correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*. He had been a reporter in Spain, Abyssinia and in Germany. For a while he had run a news-letter attacking the National Government and unearthing amazing pieces of weird information about the lives and behaviour of the various members of the Cabinet. For a time he had been a member of the Communist Party—although it was now generally thought, nobody knew for what reason, that he had 'severed his connection' with the party. It was typical of Clarence that this should be so—if it

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were so—since Clarence was accustomed to behave in a way contrary to that in which everyone else was behaving, and this was a time when the middle class of Britain were flocking into the Communist Party by the thousand. Anyway, Clarence was very successful in keeping himself apparently apart from any political party. In the Twilight Press he had clearly found his vocation, the role for which a thoughtful Deity had conceived him forty years before in Dublin. His energy in securing the appearance of the weekly newspaper, *Freedom*, and the incessant series of books and pamphlets which served to point the arguments of members of the Resistance and all opponents of collaboration, was inexhaustible.

His only associate in this enterprise was a girl secretary, Beatrice Fairfax-Moss, who sat all day long in tweeds and pearls, by the telephone or with a shorthand pad. She was without doubt the most upper-class member of the Resistance. The point was, though, that no one radiated a greater sense of ineffable superiority and graciousness. 'Actually,' she would say a hundred times a day to various callers, 'Mister Connolly is in conference. Let me ask him to give you a ring the moment he is free.' Beatrice Fairfax-Moss had orders to give this answer to everyone who called, either on the telephone or in person. On two occasions she had even fobbed off the Gestapo with this answer, so giving time for Clarence Connolly to escape—followed by herself—clutching all their valuable papers. The miraculous preservation of the Twilight Press in all its difficulties was undoubtedly largely due to her.

The Twilight Press was very busy in a small office in an upper room in Swan's Court, a narrow passageway running off Fleet Street in the direction of Lincoln's Inn. The preparation of the next issue of *Freedom* was being delayed by the

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contradictory news of the shooting at Gawthorp and the explosion at Lady Stoll's. It was the practice of *Freedom* to publish factual descriptions of all acts of sabotage by members of the Resistance, though taking elaborate care not to give away any information which might assist the authorities. This process of checking against the giving away of information occupied the same amount of time and care that the process of checking copy with libel lawyers occupied newspapers in peacetime. There was, of course, no care taken by the Twilight Press against libel, since writs of libel could never be delivered.

.

At a quarter past eleven, Connolly and Beatrice Fairfax-Moss were interrupted by a knock on the door.

'Come in.'

There entered old Worsthorne, a little old man of eighty, for many years a solicitor's clerk, looking very much his years, and suggesting in every movement that he had been born (as he had been) in 1859. He and his wife kept the small tobacconist's shop on the ground floor of the Twilight Press building.

'There's a lady, sir. Says she must see you. Immediately, sir.'

'Who is she?'

'She didn't give her name, sir.'

'No, no, but haven't you seen her before?'

'I haven't, sir, and that's the truth. I'd like to have done, sir. She's a fine-looking lady, sir.'

Connolly looked at his secretary. 'I suppose we may as well take one more risk—show her up, Worsthorne, show her up.'

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Katia came upstairs with great dignity.

'My name is Katia Nott,' she began. 'My husband, Jules Nott, was arrested for the murder of a German officer in Hampstead a few hours ago. He didn't do it.'

'I see,' said Connolly. 'Well, it's certainly been quite a night. Did they find the body?'

'No. They couldn't. It was half eaten by my children.'

'Indeed. Eaten.' Connolly was a master of not showing surprise when he felt it. 'Did the Germans—the ones who arrested your husband—know this?'

'No.'

'So's he's just been taken away on suspicion?'

'Yes.'

'Well, he won't go further than Welwyn at this stage. They wouldn't shoot him, anyway.'

'But I want,' said Katia, 'an outcry. A world-wide outcry. I thought that you'd be able to arrange it. Couldn't you get the news through to America? Broadcast it everywhere. Surely you must do that?'

Connolly turned to Beatrice. 'Perhaps we'd better alter that front page again. Let's run Gawthorp as a secondary lead, and Jules Nott as the main story. Now then, does that satisfy you, Mrs Nott? We'll get someone to radio the news across to Dublin during the night. Once the story reaches Dublin it'll get across the world in a few hours. Odd to think of Dublin as the world's communication channel, but there it is.'

'Oh, thank you. Thank you so much.' Katia turned to go.

'But don't leave us, Mrs Nott. We usually have a glass of something about this time of day. Beatrice, get Mrs Nott a drink.'

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'Thank you very much,' said Katia, who was near exhaustion.

'But you must work for your drink, Mrs Nott, all the same. What I want you to do,' Connolly said, as Beatrice left the room with a file of papers under her arm, 'is to write me an imaginary account of a street battle in Paris between French Resistance fighters and German troops. About two hundred words. Graphic. Exciting.'

'When did it happen?'

'It has not happened. Probably never will happen. But we want to publish the account of one just the same. Must keep chaps' spirits up here. Show them what can be done. Show them what might be done. You write, Mrs Nott, surely you write novels? Well then, do your best.'

'Now?'

'Of course now, Mrs Nott, we go to press at five tomorrow morning. And remember,' at this there was another knock at the door, 'put in plenty of street names. Say, for instance, "Rue Monsieur le Prince, Rue Danton, Rue du Cherche Midi—through all these narrow alleys the battle swayed to and fro".'

'But the Rue du Cherche Midi isn't narrow.'

'My dear, it really doesn't matter. It doesn't matter at all.'

Katia set to work. She now understood Maria Strachey's reservations about the methods of the Twilight Press. It was magnificent, but it was hardly literature.

Meantime, Worsthorne had appeared once more at the door. This time he had not needed to delay to announce the two next visitors, since they had been brought by the small messenger from Carey Street. They were, of course, Ann Mullaly and Michael. They too were given whisky and, being

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asked to sit down at a table opposite Katia, began, under the Svengali-like influence of Clarence Connolly, to write a report of their evening's activities. Finally, at half past twelve, Judith appeared. With her usual composure she gave a circumstantial account of her evening with Strichner to Clarence Connolly. Her part as an agent within what were, in effect, enemy lines was kept from all the other members of the Resistance.

Michael was still, of course, very angry at his supposed ill-treatment by the Resistance while he had been at Lady Stoll's. This grievance had quite overshadowed his annoyance at being thwarted in his attack upon Sir Stanley. Clarence could indeed hardly bring him to talk about the incident of the death of Gawthorp at all. Only when Clarence gave his assurance that he would print some guarded protest and warning at acts which 'have unnecessarily placed the lives of certain of our Resistance workers in jeopardy' could he be prevailed upon to speak of his own doings during the course of the day. However, eventually Clarence, as usual, got what he wanted. By about four o'clock in the morning that week's issue of *Freedom* was ready for press. Clarence left with the copy under his arm for the printer in Covent Garden who was risking his life to produce the paper. He gave a general invitation to everyone to stay the night at the offices of the Twilight Press if they wanted to. Katia and Judith both accepted the offer. Michael and Ann Mullaly went off into the night arm in arm.

18

DAWN in Albany. Michael felt a little surprised to find Ann Mullaly, the communist from Marylebone, in bed beside him.

'Straight sex, remember,' she had said as he made his way towards her. On his enquiry she explained that this was the current party line on sexual affairs. Once more on this anger-full night, a feeling of anger swept over him. What did the Communist Party mean by interfering in such things? He felt a genuine desire to overpower completely not only Ann Mullaly but at the same time the party for which she stood. Desire for mastery seemed as strong as any desire for unity of bodies. He entered into the embrace with anger rather than affection uppermost in his mind. Straight sex indeed!

But in the morning their positions were strangely reversed. It was he who felt more drawn towards communism, she who felt that after all humanity and affection were realities.

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'So you deny ever having seen any German officer in your house or outside?'

Strichner was interrogating Jules Nott in the Gestapo headquarters in Petty France.

'Absolutely.'

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'How can you explain the fact that several of your neighbours swear that they saw a body being taken into your house?'

'I explain it by suggesting that they are jealous of me and wish to get me into trouble.' Jules Nott had merely become sulky following his arrest.

This was the sort of answer that Strichner could understand. It was the sort of answer that he might have made himself. He accordingly changed his tactics.

'Would you like to paint me?'

'Certainly, if you agree to my usual charges.'

Strichner hesitated. 'If you undertake to execute a series of portraits of Nazi leaders, then I guarantee that your life will be spared. If you do not, then you will have to risk very serious punishments. What do you say?'

'Of course I agree. I repeat to you, I am a painter. I have no views on this absurd war that you are carrying on all over the world. I am loyal simply to one ideal: that of art. If you ask me to paint you and your friends then I shall be delighted to accept the commission—providing, that is, that I am able to stay here in my studio in Hampstead.'

Thus it was that Jules Nott began the series of portraits of Nazi leaders which finally established him both as the greatest painter of his day and as a friend of Germany.

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Ron Beasley of the Marylebone Communist Party left his house in Constable Road after a good night's sleep not much after the time that the folk of the Twilight Press were going to bed. He walked two or three miles in the dawn air, in a north-westerly direction, towards Edgware. As he walked, he thought

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to himself, how little these streets bear the mark of war or catastrophe. How calm and happy they seemed, with their curtains drawn, with the milkman making his round—though not the Co-op milkman, since the Co-op had been suppressed since the defeat—and a little later the postman still wearing the dark blue and red uniform of the days when all mail was Royal Mail. Ron Beasley had a difficult morning ahead of him, and as he walked he tried to rehearse what he was going to say. He had never met the formidable communist whom he knew he would find at the end of his walk, a man who had been for years in Moscow as one of the propaganda chiefs of the Comintern, and who had now come to Britain to reform the British Communist Party, to prepare it so that it would be ready to take over power when the confusion of the Occupation gave way to the incoherence of liberation. Ron Beasley was under no illusions as to why he had been chosen to help Baratov. He was known as a hard-working party member with long trade union experience who knew the personnel of the English labour movement backwards. Of course there were many people like that. The most priceless advantage possessed by Beasley was that he really did have no ideas of his own. And he was really liked, as a man, by the rest of the party. So he had been chosen to act as cicerone in England to the new leader, who was to be referred to as 'W. G. Grace'. Beasley had pointed out, and hundreds of other British communists had pointed out, that it would be quite ridiculous to give their distinguished visitor this pseudonym, since no one would have been taken in by it for a moment. However, the Comintern chiefs 'at home' were unmovable. While it was difficult enough to get a decision out of the complicated bureaucracy of the Comintern anyway, it was still more

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difficult to achieve a reversal of any decision. Someone in the Comintern had had this idea and it was far more than anyone's life was worth to suggest a change of plan. Why, the question had even gone for confirmation to the Politburo, and it was rumoured that Stalin himself had been amused by the idea. So it had become a fixed piece of party policy to name the apostle for England, the Pole Baratov, by the name of the great cricketer. And so it was that Beasley was on his way to an appointment in Edgware, at seven-thirty in the morning, with W. G. Grace.

He arrived at a semi-detached house not unlike his own. All the curtains were drawn, even at seven-thirty, and the only remarkable thing about the house was that there were five bottles of milk on the doorstep. This, in Beasley's eyes, gave an overwhelmingly sinister appearance. Surely the police would notice this? And however well the police in general behaved, and did not as a rule in any way assist the occupying authorities or the Gestapo, one could never be sure. Beasley made a mental note to remember to tell Baratov's *aides* to cut down on the milk.

Beasley knocked at the door. It was a small knocker shaped like a galleon, and it hardly seemed to make enough noise. He waited. He was equipped with the books and the professional documents of a gas inspector. And when a fat young man opened the door and asked him his business he merely said that he had come to read the meter.

'So early?' asked the young man, using the agreed counter-sign. It was a characteristic of communist passwords and countersigns that they were always conventional, and not at all *farouche* and fanciful like those of the rest of the Resistance: for example, one group in the Resistance always used allusions

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to *Alice in Wonderland* for their signs, and as a result had found themselves betrayed by an Englishman in the service of the Gestapo.

'It is high time everyone was up,' Beasley meanwhile answered, according to plan.

'Some went to bed late,' returned the fat young man, 'and may be expected to lie late too.' This was the last of his responses, and he waited expectantly for Beasley's reply.

'“Early to bed and early to rise” is my advice,' answered Beasley, glad to get the rigmarole over. He had never done so, but he sometimes felt a vague fear that he might forget a certain part of the agreed dialogue, and so he henceforth regarded with deep suspicion. It was an extraordinary and for him a purely compulsive fear, since his memory was in fact phenomenally good.

'Would you come this way, please?'

The fat young man led Beasley upstairs and then up a narrower flight of stairs into the attic. From here a passage ran into the top of the garage. Here, sitting on a camp-bed, surrounded by papers, with a bottle of milk standing on the table, was the huge figure of Baratov.

Baratov, Beasley noted with surprise, bore certain resemblances to his supposed *alter ego*, W. G. Grace. He was not only very large, but also he had an enormous beard. He moved slowly, in a stately way, and spoke slowly too, in excellent if ornate English. He seemed a communist of the old era, of the days of plots in Zurich between mensheviks and bolshevists, rather than one who had survived the purges under Stalin. It was only, in fact, his prestige in the Polish Communist Party which had enabled him to survive. Yet not only had this Romantic continued in his position but he had clearly endeared

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himself in some way to Stalin. It was common gossip in Moscow that Baratov was the only man with whom Stalin could really unbend. This position had, of course, its dangers, but Baratov's passive temperament enabled him apparently to triumph at least over contemplation of them.

'This is the English comrade, comrade,' said the fat young man, introducing Beasley.

'Good,' said Baratov, 'you're welcome here. I'm glad to see you. I've been isolated here for two days without news of England. We have a radio, but we hear little from that. Sit down, comrade. You know why you're here, of course?'

Beasley nodded.

'You've been chosen to be here, but it might have been any one of a thousand others, you understand. Anyone can do this. I shall just ask you questions. I shall take account of what is known of your personality when analysing what you say. I shall be travelling round England a lot, and I shall want you to accompany me. You can delegate the affairs of your branch to someone reliable?'

'I could resign it?'

'No, under no circumstances do that. Delegate your powers. In that way you give someone else a suspicion of power without permitting them the luxury of their even partially public display. We shall, of course, be doing a lot of hard work. You do not mind hard work, I hope?'

Beasley shook his head. He understood to what Baratov was referring. He foresaw a whole itinerary of purges in parts of England of various degrees of obscurity. There was no question, he thought, of shrinking from this. Besides, it seemed clear to him that Baratov like himself was enough of a pre-Stalinist to be humane, not actually to desire to kill Trotskyists

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for killings' sake—even though he and Baratov had had such different apprenticeships for their partnership. Yes, Beasley thought that he could work with Baratov, or W. G. Grace even. Indeed, he had rarely thought that he would have been able to work so well with anyone as he thought he would with Baratov.

19

MICHAEL reached his office in Maiden Lane with Field Marshal von Hassel's friend Henry's poems in his pocket and a sense of general uncertainty in his head. Ann Mullaly, Gawthorp, Lady Stoll, the Twilight Press—these were almost too much to assimilate at the same time. He walked slowly up to his office, a big light room surrounded by books which he and his firm, Farquhar and Watson, had published. Neither Mr Farquhar nor Mr Watson, of course, still lived, though their families still had interests in the firm. Old Colonel Farquhar, who had made his money in slave-trading in Angola, had had two ugly daughters who had married various collaborationist Members of Parliament. Mr Watson's son was alive, and was indeed also still a director of the firm. Michael, also a director, was production manager in the firm, and there were about four or five executive and salaried persons (two of whom were also directors) working in rooms along the corridor.

As usual on Michael's arrival *The Times* and various other newspapers were spread out on his desk in case he had not had time to read them at home. This, due to Ann Mullaly, was the case on this day in question.

Throughout the period of defeat and occupation *The Times* had kept up a single tone: injunction to maintain calm.

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It had never actually supported the collaborationist government and had never denounced the Resistance. So far as was possible it had crept back into a neutral shell and its leading articles had been for two years now masterpieces of non-committal writing. Some knew that the paper's official policy had in fact been defied just after the defeat by none other than the editor; who, aghast at the flow of events, had, admittedly with calm, sat down and shot himself in his own office. His successor, Dingle Besant, brought in from outside with, it was said, the active support of Sir Stanley Jackson, had been a prominent 'pro-German' in the years before the war. However, the paper under him had been more crablike than it had ever been previously. For instance, the leading article on the death of Mr Gawthorp, which was now read in the first-floor office in Maiden Lane by his assassin, ran as follows:

'And so, after a lifetime of public service, JOHN GAWTHORP has perished under the assault of one whom a section of the community will regard as a common criminal, another section a hero. The paradox of his death was not immediately apparent in the manner of his life. Those who knew him will, however, be today mourning at least three men—as our OBITUARY notice on page ten suggests. There was a GAWTHORP who was a disciplinarian, feared by the rank and file of the party which he served for so long as Whip. There was a GAWTHORP the friend of negotiation—in India, with Germany and Italy, and with the leaders of the unemployed. There was also—and it may be that in the last resort it will be in this sphere that his ultimate fame may repose—GAWTHORP the bibliophile.

On the wider question of the implications of so sudden

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a death, it may be some days before it will be possible to comment freely. Enquiries are going on, and there is no doubt that they will continue to go on. But few can doubt that the murder occurred from political rather than private motives—though presumably the question of private motives will have to be fully explored by the police. The frequency of killings by the self-styled Resistance has increased of late. Those who deplore such an appeal to violence will be supported in their renewed protests by all who have made similar protests before. The man (or woman) responsible for this sudden death must search his conscience whether the sense of outrage which will possess all thoughtful persons will be outweighed by any temporary political gain which will accrue to his cause.'

Michael did not trouble to examine his conscience, but turned over the rest of the paper with casual interest. The very sameness of the lay-out of *The Times* compared with what it was like in the 'degenerate interbellum decades'—as the fascists liked to call the years between 1819 and 1839—angered Michael. There it all was—the 'Imperial and Foreign' page reporting the events of the war in Russia, Africa and the Far East, the page of 'Home News', which, except for unemployment, was precisely what it had been in the 'thirties, 'The Arts', describing films, plays and books, and the 'Law Report', with the same judges making the same witticisms and allusions and, so it seemed, the same plaintiffs bringing the same complicated suits. Michael threw down *The Times* in anger, and went in to see his Managing Director, Montpelier Aleyn.

Montpelier Aleyn greeted him with his usual acerbity. 'Morning, Michael (sniff). I'm not sorry Gawthorp is gone

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(sniff), are y-you? He was a w-w-wet rag all right. Hadn't got his h-h-heart and soul in the business?' Montpelier Aleyn raised his eyes upwards at this moment in, apparently, an attempt to invoke the assistance of the Deity, to give him support in his views. 'Of course (sniff) people ought to expect things like that to happen every day and act accordingly. N-no use thinking that a government (sniff) can make friends with your enemies and be allowed to get away with it all the time (sniff)—I mean, you've g-g-got to have a secret police and all that sort of thing. You can't do things by halves. Not in the twentieth century you can't.'

'I thought we'd got a secret police as it was, Monty?' said Michael, carefully unfolding the poems given to him by Field Marshal von Hassel.

'Y-y-you don't mean (sniff) the Gestapo (Montpelier Aleyn was proud of his pronunciation of this word, with the emphasis on the last syllable), do you? I didn't think that c-c-cut much ice (sniff). They're too cautious for my money, too cautious by far. I mean here you have your opportunity of s-s-stringing up half the undesirables, Jews and freemasons, in England—and what do they do? Put them up in luxury holiday camps in Welwyn Garden City (sniff). It's very nice and restful for them. They have time to think—and they'll have all the time in the world to write their books—not to speak of all those bloody reviewers who used to make fools of themselves over our books. (Sniff, sniff, sniff.) I mean, the thing's absurd. However, what are you clutching there, like a p-p-promising young novelist?'

'I dined last night with Lady Stoll,' said Michael.

'I see (sniff), and these are her memoirs? I am surprised

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to see you here. Weren't you all blown sky h-h-high (sniff)? A pity. I never did like Albert Rook. Wasn't he there? My paper said he w-w-was anyway. Didn't mention you, though. I was at Oxford with Albert Rook. He was a funny little weasel of a man then. He used to smell. I went to the same tutor. When questioned about the smell, he said he was recovering from a mastoid. Pretended he didn't hear the question, the silly little weasel.' In his enthusiasm Montpelier Aleyn had recovered both from his sniff and stutter.

'No, they are poems given to me by Hassel. Did your paper tell you he was there? No? Well, he was, and it was, of course, him that they were after.'

'Oh, they were, were they?'

'The poems are by a boy friend of his. I haven't read them myself. But I think we should publish anyway.'

'I see. It all depends on how close the relationship between the field marshal and the boy actually is.'

'I gained the impression it was close.'

'Did you, indeed? How repetitious these Germans are. They're all the same. Sentiment and sensuality, the two German goddesses. I had better take a look at them. The poems I mean, then I'll give them to someone who thinks he knows about poetry. And we'll have his opinion to guide us too. Though, as you say, I suppose we'll have to publish. So long as they're so obscure that no one can really say they're nonsense (sniff). Though (Montpelier Aleyn opened the book of poems with distaste) they look pretty obvious to me: don't you think (sniff)?' Montpelier Aleyn shuddered slightly, and put away the exercise books. 'Anything else? Though I tell you that you must spare me a repetition of *that* shock (he pointed to the exercise book). Later perhaps we might have

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an anthology. "Poems written by Englishmen in honour of their German allies." How does that sound?"

'Nothing else. I shall be passing Lord Boodle's memoirs for production today. It seems to me in admirable order.'

'Good. We ought to be able to do something with it, don't you think?'

'Definitely.'

'It's the best apologia for appeasement I've seen yet—though, I must say, the market's getting a little glutted with books of that kind. One m-m-might almost think they had something to hide, the way they rush into print. Nothing else?'

'Nothing else.'

'All right, Michael.'

'Thank you, Monty.' And Michael returned to his own room. He found his secretary, old Miss Plaice, in a fine flap.

'Oh, Michael,' she said. 'There's a Miss Mullaly wanting to speak to you. She's rung up twice already. She gave a Maida Vale number,' added Miss Plaice with distaste.

'I see. Thank you,' said Michael. When Miss Plaice had gone off to make coffee about half an hour later, he telephoned Ann Mullaly.

Ann Mullaly's message was strictly official. 'Do you want to take your protest before the proper authorities? If so, *we* can fix it.' Michael was in no doubt that 'we' signified the party.

'I see.'

'Do I take it you want *us* to go ahead?'

'Er—yes. Yes, I do.'

'*We* of course shall support you at the hearing.' And she rang off.

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But that night the two of them met again. The process of the previous night repeated itself. The party line on sex was tacitly ignored by Ann Mullaly. And Michael, though drawn increasingly towards the disciplined explanation of life afforded by communism, similarly ignored the claim of the party to interfere in such delicate relations.

IN THE meantime a telegram reached von Hassel in his suite at Claridges. Addressed to Military Governor, London, and despatched by Ribbentrop in Berlin, it was headed CYPHER, MOST SECRET, EMERGENCY. It ran:

‘The Fuehrer is dissatisfied about the condition of Britain. He considers that the murders of prominent friends of the Reich, and other acts of sabotage by the Resistance, have proved that the policy of moderation, agreed with Jackson after the defeat constantly urged (and praised) by you, has failed. I am accordingly to instruct you to pursue henceforth a policy of “strength”. Detailed instructions in my immediately following telegram. Please alert all security forces and head of political police. You may tell Jackson that the Fuehrer has determined to liquidate all centres of resistance in Britain. In the event of protest or non-co-operation by Jackson, please report immediately by emergency telegram. The Fuehrer anyway desires you pay special attention to the young fascist leader Warren. Fuehrer believes that history may well have reserved for Warren an important role.’

PART II

I

THE winter hardened. So did the character of the regime. Sir Stanley Jackson continued to hold the portfolio of first minister, but was increasingly overshadowed by his ex-private secretary, Warren, who had assumed the title of Minister of State. He and Mary Bright-Smith, leader of the English women's Nazi Party, shared the patronage of the country, but not really the power. They might be able to appoint bishops and judges, but they were themselves only free to follow the lead of the occupying power. Father Fairlie had set up his commission and was known to be busy investigating the political activities of clergymen in East Anglia. But this meant that he was no longer to be found in the ante-chambers of the Prime Minister. A relief for both Jackson and Warren.

Yet it would be wrong to leave the impression that it was Field Marshal von Hassel who held all the power in Britain. He held increasingly glorious parades but he too was becoming a *roi fainéant*. Strichner's was the power seen everywhere in occupied London. His security troops had been doubled. His own position had been raised to that of head of all the Gestapo and security police in the British Isles. Yet he too had to confess a master. Nearly every night now he would repair to the luxury apartment in which Judith had now been installed in Mount Street. Judith every night would dress

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herself in riding breeches, boots, a hat belonging to a Uhlan, and a black shirt. This elaborate play seemed never to weary the personality of the Gestapo chief. Always he would come back for more. She, on the other hand, began gradually to enjoy the ceremony herself. In her merciless strokes of the whip she put all her hatred of Germany, all the feelings of contempt which she had for the oppressors of her race. Clarence Connolly of the Twilight Press, in whom she continued to confide, pointed out that if Strichner enjoyed his whipping then she was in no way punishing him. She, on the other hand, pointed out that each renewal of the rite represented a further degradation for Strichner, a further surrender to her power. Eventually, she pointed out, she would be able to do anything with him that she wanted. 'I shall be able to control the whole workings of the occupation of Britain,' she maintained. Thus real power in Britain seemed about to pass to, of all people, a slim dark girl who spent her afternoons at the Camberwell School of Sculpture. Meantime, any information which she gathered she passed on immediately to Connolly. Thus each new move in the intensification of the 'pacification' of Britain was notified to the Twilight Press.

Meantime, Ann Mullaly lived with Michael in Albany. And because that formidable bastion of the Marylebone Communist Party distrusted Michael's relations with Lady Stoll, Michael gradually slipped out of the habit of visiting members of the collaborationist group. Ann Mullaly exacted this price for 'security reasons'—so she said. Michael, however, privately believed that she thought Lady Stoll had been his mistress.

The Twilight Press had a new member on its staff—Katia Nott. She worked incessantly, with total concentration and

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seriousness. She never spoke of the life which she had left behind in Hampstead, nor of her husband. He, on the other hand, worked ferociously at his great portrait of Strichner. No one had yet seen it, but it was generally understood to be a masterpiece. The Nott children remained with Maria Strachey in Bloomsbury. Jules Nott, who had begun by disliking his loneliness in the big house without Katia, shortly began to relish it. He dined out every night, prowled the streets with a freedom that no one else would have dared, dropped in at all sorts of strange gatherings to which he had not been invited, visited Lady Stoll, drank in the Athenaeum with Sir Albert Rook, and sketched ferociously all the time. He would give occasional interviews to the censored Press delivering himself of extraordinary and original comments on Art, Life, God, Nature and, occasionally, Military Tactics.

2

SIX COCKS SIX

SHROVE TUESDAY

February 3rd, at 7.15 p.m.

THREE MAINS

the birds the property of

Sr. Alfred Liliburne Kt., Jos.

Newman Esq., & Ld. Ed. Brice

The

COCKPIT ROYAL, WESTMINSTER

Tickets £5-5-0, £3-3-0, £1-0-0

10/6, 5/9 at the pit or from agents

A LARGE poster proclaiming the imminence of this remarkable attraction was plastered all over the hoardings of London. For among the curious manifestations of the Occupation was the revival of the ancient and royal game of cocking or cock-fighting. Of course, this sport has lingered on since the passage of the 'Act for the More Effective Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' in 1849. Like an extinct heresy, cock-fighting could be found in Cumberland and in Norfolk even in the decadent 'thirties. But immediately after the conquest, this pursuit began to be met with everywhere once again. The Act of 1849 was practically ignored. Cockpits were opened in every large town in the country. Old cockpits

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such as the County Pit at Truro (which had become a spirit vault) and the Chester Pit (which had been turned into a foundry) were besieged and overcome by ardent devotees of cocking. Football, cricket and racing suffered a remarkable decline in popularity. Partly this was because many of the protagonists in these sports had gone into exile. But partly it was because cocking seemed to the mass of people something which, though deeply rooted in the habits of the race, nevertheless was in some way uncorrupted by defeat and disgrace. Cricket revived memories of the Oval in 1838, of tours in Australia, of a world which everyone, collaborators and men of the Resistance, desired passionately to forget. So cocking came back, though the rules were somewhat altered from those which had been generally accepted a hundred years before. Yet if the rules were changed, everything else was the same. As in the past, it was an egalitarian sport. Men and women (and the excited attendance of the latter was one of the more remarkable aspects of the scenes in cockpits) of all classes cursed, sweated and bet together. In addition, cock-fights were attended with equal regularity by *collaborateurs* and members of the Resistance. The only Englishmen who opposed the development publicly were the exiles in Canada. News of this change in our national habits had of course reached Ottawa and Montreal, and from time to time the authorities there issued shocked statements of disapproval. The Germans meantime were at first puzzled by the new craze, but eventually accepted it. German soldiers were, however, from the start ordered to keep away from cockpits. The occupying authorities, acting intuitively, feared that some awful incident would inevitably follow if they permitted their men to rub shoulders with the English crowd on these rumbustious occasions.

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Sir Alfred Liliburne was probably the man who had done most to make cocking really respectable once more. He had seen the way things were going down at Newmarket and it had been he who had put up some of the money to start the big London cockpits, such as the Cockpit Royal, Westminster, and the Tudor Street Cockpit, on the site of the *Observer* newspaper, which had been shelled by the Germans as they came up the Thames. More important still, he had effectively prevented the Church from making any pronouncement on the matter. Further, he had managed to persuade Father Fairlie to make a statement which could be interpreted as favouring cock-fighting in a sermon at St Martin-in-the-Fields one hot Sunday the previous summer. It was later revealed that one of Sir Alfred's *aides* had pointed out to Father Fairlie that Roger Ascham had been devoted to cock-fighting and that it had been this which had finally convinced this violent priest that it was his duty to speak out.

The morning of the great main to be held on Shrove Tuesday, Sir Alfred sent for his cockmaster, Bill Dutton, an old Norfolk game-cock breeder, who had been running cock-fights in his part of the country for a long time. Dutton thought of himself rather as a Jesuit might have done—in the same part of the island—during the long days of persecution of the Roman faith, in say the eighteenth century. It had been his duty to keep alive the ancient rite, in however dark and small corners, confident that one day the law would be relaxed, and that those who had fought for their faith in the troubled time would eventually be rewarded. And Bill Dutton was right. He was rewarded. Walking smartly down the hall of Sir Alfred's house in Belgrave Square, Bill Dutton caught a glimpse of himself in a long mirror. He paused, appreciatively.

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'Who'd 'ave thought it,' he said to himself aloud. 'That's a damned fine coat you're wearing. Yer father'd be pleased wi' yer.' Bill Dutton's father had himself been a sought-after cockmaster in the dark days and he had always been confident that the good old times, which his own grandfather had known, would one day return.

The footman who was escorting Bill Dutton to Sir Alfred looked the other way while the cockmaster straightened his tie in the glass and winked quietly at himself.

'Ready now at last, thank you,' said Bill Dutton to the footman, and they started off along the path to Sir Alfred's study. Bill Dutton was a short, stubbly man, with a large growth under his left ear. Sir Alfred had offered to have this removed by one of the best doctors in the country, but Bill Dutton had refused, saying (and believing) that this hideous excrescence had brought him good luck.

Sir Alfred got quickly to his feet when Dutton was announced.

'Ah, Bill,' he exclaimed, putting out his hand. 'Shall we have a good night tonight, do you suppose?'

'We've got some good birds, Sir Alfred,' said Dutton. 'They've recovered nicely from the journey up. None of 'em lost any weight. The "cutting out" this morning went as smooth as I've known it, sir.'

'How much do you feed 'em on the fight morning?' asked Sir Alfred, who was interested in the details of training and feeding cocks for fighting.

'Forty grains of barley and not one more,' answered Dutton.

'I can't get to the heeling,' said Sir Alfred regretfully, 'but I'll be there pretty soon after, I expect at around half

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six.' It was customary for the spurs or 'heels' to be fastened to fighting cocks about two hours before the fight began.

'Naturally, Sir Alfred, you can leave all that to Bill Dutton,' said Dutton.

'Bless you, Dutton,' said Sir Alfred. 'And, tell me, what is the money around?'

'There's a lot of money on the black-breasted red,' answered Dutton.

'Indeed, Dutton, and what do you call a lot of money?'

'I should say a hard twenty thousand is bet on that bird.'

'A *hard* twenty thousand, Dutton?'

'That's it, sir, a *hard* twenty thousand.'

'And where do you rate the chances?'

'Well, sir, you remember his showing at Bury?'

'Of course.'

'Well, sir, he's a cock that'll always attack at once. Between you and me, sir, he's the sort of bird that'll kill in the first five minutes or not at all.'

'I prefer that sort of bird—and so does the spectator—to those artful dodgers who sometimes do so well.'

'Well, sir, it's been my habit to breed the sharp fighters all my life, sir. And I don't think the game's going to profit from the artful ones. I think that most seriously, sir.'

'Who's our other hope for tonight, Dutton?'

'Oh, sir, he's a clever bird, sir; a cross, as a matter of fact, Sir Alfred, between a Duckwing and a Smokey Dun. There's a touch of Shropshire Red too in his ancestry. He's not an easy bird, sir, but an interesting one. He'll give an interesting fight, sir.'

'Ah.' Sir Alfred looked out of the window. 'I haven't seen him fight before?'

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'No, sir.'

'Remember, Dutton, this main means a lot to me.'

'I'd never forget that, sir. Never.'

'I don't care about the money. I care about the prestige. My birds must be the best in the kingdom. If they don't win, they must never show their heels, hey, Dutton?'

'No bird of mine, sir, has ever shown a pair of heels, clean or otherwise, since the Revival.' (It was by this description that Dutton referred to the removal of the penalties against cock-fighting.)

'I'm just worried about the mixture. Couldn't you get up another pure black-breasted red?'

'Good God, sir, that'd be quite impossible. They're none trained up ready. Then they take about a week to get over the journey from Norfolk. Oh no, sir, that would be quite impossible.' Dutton looked at Sir Alfred pityingly. Was it possible that the baronet could really have made so ignorant a suggestion?

'Of course not. I was thinking aloud, Dutton, just thinking aloud.'

'Of course, sir.' But it would be a long time before Dutton's respect for Sir Alfred would be restored.

'What do you know about our opponents?' meantime asked the baronet.

'Nothing much to fear from Joseph Newman, he's all show, sir. Of course, it all depends who we're picked against.' The custom in engagements of this kind was for a brace of cocks to be put up for a main (or cock match) by three proprietors. After the sharp spurs had been fixed to the legs of the cock, lots would be drawn to see which cock would fight against which. All one knew was that one of Sir Alfred's cocks

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would fight one each of Lord Edgar Brice's and Joseph Newman's. This formal arrangement of a main was the chief difference between the fights of the present and those of the past. In the past, also, far more attention had been paid to weight. Cocks were then so far as possible matched with those of equal weight. Now an owner would simply put forward his best bird and chance whether he met a bird of comparable character.

'Good, Dutton, very good.' Sir Alfred smiled. Dutton bowed.

'I shall see you at the pit then, Sir Alfred?'

'At the pit, towards six.'

3

THE cocking season in England lasted from August to May. During this time there were two main sorts of cock-fights; those between individual towns or counties, both of whom were classed in the form of a league; and the grander fights, on special occasions such as Shrove Tuesday, Easter morning, Whit Monday and Martinmas. (The choice of dates such as the last was another typical development of Resistance England. For there was a revival, again apparently spontaneous at the beginning but taken over by the authorities thereafter, of ancient and even archaic customs. Thus there was even a campaign in favour of using 'thee' and 'thou' in place of 'you'. There was a pronounced effort by many authorities, who had nothing to do with the Germans at all, to try and establish the canons and speech of 'Merrie England'; Victorian England, along with the whole history of the country, indeed, since the mid-nineteenth century, was regarded by nearly everyone as an aberration and a mistake.)

The match organized in the Cockpit Royal, Westminster, for this Shrove Tuesday was undoubtedly one of the most important in the year. The interest was concentrated not only on the certainty that there would be bound to be very good birds fighting, but there was also the matter of the owners of the birds. Sir Alfred Liliburne, with his top hat, his florid face, his reputation as a Haroun al Raschid with women, and his

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proximity to the sources of power, was a certain draw all of his own.

But then there was Lord Edgar Brice. This ancient nobleman, uncle of the Duke of Essex, was well known to have been cocking all his life—even in the days of official frowns and police interference. He was in fact the Dutton of the nobility. But now, alas, he was blind. Three months before the conquest, his eyes had finally failed him. The tragedy of his life was that he could now not even see his own famous line of pedigree Cheshire Piles—the celebrated breed which his family had founded in the old days. Yet this frail and venerable figure, his sightless eyes hidden behind dark glasses, would inevitably be seen on the *barrera* seats of every important main in the kingdom.

The last of the owners was Joseph Newman, the son of a distinguished Labour politician of the days before the war. There was no reason to suppose that Joseph Newman had any gift for cock-breeding or for securing the services of a good cockmaster. But his curious circumstances attracted attention. His father was in a concentration camp at Welwyn. He was himself the proprietor of a chain of breweries. A noted and indeed notorious homosexual, he was believed to be one of the members of the 'Hassel circle'. It was with horrified fascination, therefore, that the cock-fighting public looked forward to seeing so obviously wicked a man in so obvious a capacity. For, as a rule, young Newman studiously avoided the limelight.

The Cockpit Royal was established on the site of Caxton Hall, once the scene of so many meetings in one good cause or another. This appeared, of course, to the many who disapproved of cocking as one final profane insult, a diabolic

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parody of the good intentions of the past. Yet this did not seem to disturb very many people on Shrove Tuesday. From half past five onwards the crowds began to mass in the street outside. Men and women came alike, all dressed in the dark shapeless clothes of those days, arrived by bus and by bicycle. Practically no one came by private car, because of course no petrol was allocated for private motoring. Some officials did come in large cars driven by chauffeurs, but these were few and far between. In general, the cock-fighting *aficionados* seemed outside in the street a grey and passionless set of people from a single anonymous middle class.

Inside, the scene was totally different. Can one ever forget the extraordinary sensation of being at a cock-fight in the middle of the Occupation? The stage on which the cocks were to fight was a circle about twelve feet in diameter. Above, large and powerful lights hung suspended so that every speck of dust was visible many yards away. All around, tiers of seats rose to the roof of the hall. Large doors led to the betting booths at the back of the seats. Here also were bars, where weak beer could be bought at exorbitant cost.

Michael and Ann Mullaly were standing waiting in the bar nearest the totalisator. They had arranged to meet there with Beasley of the Marylebone Party, and two or three others of their Resistance group. Michael had now gained preliminary agreement of the Resistance Council to hear his case before it, but as yet no date had been fixed. He had tentatively agreed with Ann Mullaly that he would join the Communist Party if he gained satisfaction from the Council as a result of the party's championship of his complaint. This had seemed a perfectly reasonable bargain from the party point of view.

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After all it was they who wanted Michael to join them, not the other way round.

The crowd was immense. Pushed backwards and forwards by the ardent enthusiasts, Michael and Ann Mullaly cursed the moment that Beasley had appointed for this curious rendezvous. Neither of them had ever attended a cock-fight. Ann disapproved of the 'Revival' but Michael confessed himself interested.

'I'm trying to get the Central Council to come out against the whole thing,' said Ann Mullaly. She meant the Central Council of the Resistance.

'Is it worth while worrying about?' asked Michael.

'Of course, it's degrading.'

'I think that if enough people are really against it then it should be stopped. I can't see any point in stopping it before. Anyway, doesn't your party have something to say on the matter? Surely you should get them to pronounce?'

This was obviously a difficult question for Ann Mullaly, but she answered. 'The party are very anxious not to undertake a policy which might lead them into opposition with any of the Resistance groups. Therefore it would be best if the Central Council pronounced first.'

'But how will the communist members of the Central Council vote?' This was a genuine puzzle for Michael. Ann Mullaly evidently thought that he was trying to catch her out, because she said:

'I have no doubt that they will vote as their conscience dictates.'

'Or abstain perhaps,' said Michael mildly.

Ann Mullaly looked at him very hard so as to be absolutely certain that he was not trying to make fun of her. She was

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about to retort fiercely when they were conscious of a violent stir in the crowd. Two heavily built men with the air of the henchmen of a professional wrestler were making a path for a diminutive and frail old man in dark glasses. Michael knew this to be Lord Edgar Brice, whom he had known quite well in his gayer days before the war. However, since the old man was blind there was, he thought, no chance of being recognized. Lord Edgar seemed very hot and very angry as he pushed his way forwards to the bar, followed presumably by his cockmaster.

'Well, Hawkins, don't stand round doing nothing. Get me a whisky, will you?'

'Sorry, m'lord, there's no whisky. All there is is beer. Beer, m'lord.'

'Beer, m'lord,' sniggered someone in the crowd.

Lord Edgar turned round sharp as a knife. 'Who said that? Good God, sir, I felt that I should have to repent my all-too-hasty agreement to venture into the public enclosure. Is this the Cockpit Royal or is it some foul festering slum of Wapping that I should have to put up with such an appalling humiliation? Silence, damn you, since you cannot keep a civil tongue in your twisted mouth, for God's sake be silent!' And silence there was. Lord Edgar turned back towards the bar, tapping his cockmaster with his white stick. 'Beer then, let it be beer, Hawkins. And tell me you've given *Gypsy* some communion bread to peck at as usual?'

'Naturally, m'lord.'

'Good, good, we shall always win if our cocks have a bite of a communion wafer before they enter battle. Curious, isn't it,' added Lord Edgar to the watching crowd, 'curious how religion and superstition weave themselves together even on

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the most unlikely occasions? But yet I forget—I forget to what rabble I am speaking!’ He cast a contemptuous glance at the crowd around him, who continued to listen fascinated and even more admiring with every new insult.

Michael, however, felt it necessary to take up the argument.

‘Lord Edgar Brice, isn’t it?’ he remarked, slightly insultingly. ‘I think we met at Cynthia Stoll’s before the defeat.’

‘That’s a voice I know,’ quacked Lord Edgar hastily. ‘Who is it, Hawkins? Tell me, damn you, who is it?’

‘I don’t know, I’m sure, m’lord,’ answered Hawkins, who had been busy getting himself some beer.

‘Who are you then, sir?’ demanded Lord Edgar.

‘Michael Grenville,’ said Michael. ‘I think you knew my mother.’

‘Knew her! Certainly, my dear boy,’ snapped Lord Edgar. ‘What are you doin’ here? You ought to be fighting for your country, sir, you oughtn’t to be here. I’m too old. All I can do is to fight cocks. But you. . . . You ought to get out there. See the world at the same time,’ he added sniffing.

Before Michael could reply, a distant trumpet announced that the main was about to begin. Everyone began to push their way away, except for the small group immediately around Lord Edgar, which seemed inclined to be waiting for some kind of order to dismiss. Among these dozen or so heads, Ann Mullaly had distinguished that of Beasley, who had seen her in return. However, it was not immediately clear how they would be able to establish contact, for they were separated by Lord Edgar’s curious followers.

‘Coming to watch the fight?’ Lord Edgar asked Michael. ‘Come with me if you like. I’d like company.’

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Ann Mullaly gave Michael a sharp jab in the ribs to restrain him from accepting this curious invitation. But Michael, however, misinterpreted the gesture as a suggestion that she wished to come too. So he said: 'Yes, sir, how good of you. But I've got someone with me.'

'Ha ha,' said Lord Edgar. 'Of course. Bring her with you. Of course. Forgive me, though, if I'm not very attentive. I've got a lot to think about. A lot at stake. That swine Liliburne has got to be done, you know.' With this, he picked up his white stick, and led the way onwards.

The noise of shouting and swearing on every side was now enormous and it was quite impossible for Ann Mullaly to tell Michael that it would be extremely unwise for him to accept this invitation. Thinking, however, that if she allowed him to go off by himself with Lord Edgar that she might risk losing him altogether, both for herself and for the party, she nevertheless followed on behind, at the same time signing to Beasley to follow her also. Therefore it was rather a curious procession, attended by both of Lord Edgar's heavy bruisers and also the cockmaster Hawkins, that a moment later arrived in Lord Edgar's box on the ringside. Huge cheers broke across the hall. Lord Edgar, delighted, stood up and waved his white stick in the air. He was still waving to his supporters when Liliburne and Newman slipped into their boxes on the further side of the ring.

Beasley meantime had been prevented from entering Lord Edgar's box, though both Michael and Ann Mullaly had got inside, and were now standing behind the old man, both trying to attract as little attention as possible.

The first main of the evening was announced as that

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between Liliburne's black-breasted red and Joseph Newman's leading bird, a stag Red Dun. The two birds were brought into the ring by Dutton on the one hand and by a young man who looked as if he might himself have been a member of the 'Hassel set'. The band was meanwhile playing the famous old march, the 'Czarine'. But the notes were barely distinguishable above the noise of shouting and cheering. Everyone in the crowded arena—perhaps three thousand people packed tight against each other to the roof—seemed to be shouting encouragement to the bird which they fancied. A large number of people near Lord Edgar's box were shouting for Lord Edgar's bird, Gypsy, even though he was not to fight until after the black-breasted red had killed the stag Red Dun, or *vice versa*. Lord Edgar himself was entirely carried away by the excitement of the scene, and seemed to fancy that the whole room was still cheering his arrival. He had laid down his stick now and was nearly bent double with laughter, at the same time beating his arms up and down in the air. It was quite impossible for either Ann Mullaly or Michael to refrain from joining in the enthusiasm. Beasley, who, after a long altercation, had been permitted to stand right at the back of the entrance to Lord Edgar's box on the grounds that he was Michael's bodyguard, was horrified to see the back views of Michael and Ann Mullaly as slowly they also began to gesticulate and move their bodies in a crescendo of animation. Beasley himself was not able to see the actual pit but could merely hear the noise. The incident puzzled him greatly.

The President of the main, who acted as judge and time-keeper, now arrived in his box in the centre of the ring immediately opposite Lord Edgar. Before the war he had been a

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leading official of the Lawn Tennis Association. At how many Wimbledons had he not assisted effortlessly as a rehearsal, as it would seem, to this new assignment! He was wearing full evening dress with a white tie and tails, and his somewhat weary and *passé* air hardly matched the events over which he was presiding. As he took his seat, a trumpet sounded once again, rather as if he were a herald in a Shakespearean historical play. For the first time a sudden silence came over the whole cockpit.

The two cockmasters now approached each other, each holding their precious birds. Glinting in the bright light, the sharp spur (gaffle) of each of them caused a thrill of horror and pleasure to run through the rapt spectators. The two cockmasters set down their birds facing each other, though for a moment they each held on to their backs. The two beaks were placed together, and the President of the fight raised his arm. The two cockmasters drew away from the birds and the main had begun.

As Dutton had foretold, the black-breasted red went into the attack with extreme ferocity at the first moment. He was a fine tall bird with a blood-red comb. His colouring rather ominously resembled, Michael reflected, that of the old Austrian national flag. His opponent seemed more pale and almost effete, and was clearly taken aback by the attack of the black-breasted red. The Liliburne supporters were obviously jubilant. Looking across towards Liliburne's box, Michael observed various people whom he recognized as being almost the same as those who had been with Lady Stoll on the night when he had dined with her. There was Sir Albert and Lady Rook and surely that was Mary Bright-Smith? It seemed to

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Michael to be curiously indiscreet of these eminent persons to sally out to a cock-fight, but then, of course, Sir Stanley apart, the present English government was almost as raffish as that of France under the Directory. Lady Liliburne was not present but instead there was, so it seemed, a very pretty dark girl, probably Italian, who might be Liliburne's latest mistress. Several other people were also in the Liliburne box, and all seemed excited and enchanted by what they were seeing. In the box belonging to Joseph Newman, however, there was scarcely the same enthusiasm. Joseph Newman himself sat hunched over the ring, and watched without apparently registering any emotion whatever. A small group, all men, stood around him, obviously also dissatisfied.

The Liliburne bird had by now struck its opponent several times. Blood was flowing freely. Instead, however, of feeling any commiseration for the suffering of the unfortunate bird, the crowd seemed to be most anxious to mock his lack of pugnacity. It seemed that as yet his spur was still quite dry of blood. Every time, however, that the Liliburne bird struck, the crowd gave an excited heave of satisfaction. But this reaction was of course indistinguishable from the heave of disgust that they also gave at the moment when the Newman bird was hit. At last (yet though it seemed a long time, it was hardly more than two minutes) the Newman bird was down. The Liliburne cock gave it what it supposed was a final blow with the spur. The Newman bird raised itself slightly and the Liliburne bird drove home its advantage this time by pecking at its eyes. The crowd gave great whoops of enthusiasm as the Newman bird finally flopped against the floor. Dutton ran forward to take the victor, while Newman's

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cockmaster came more shamefacedly to pick up the crumpled remains of the other. The whole fight had lasted less than four minutes. The crowd cheered Dutton but it was clear that they felt they had been seriously let down by what they thought to be the cowardly performance of the vanquished.

4

THE second fight was that between Lord Edgar's and Liliburne's second birds. It was, so connoisseurs immediately pointed out, a very poor and scrappy fight. But it nevertheless continued for nearly an hour. It resulted in yet another win for Liliburne. This was very disappointing to Lord Edgar and, as it seemed, to many in the crowd also. Liliburne had now won two fights. Even if Lord Edgar were to win the final fight against Newman with Gypsy, he could not hope to beat Liliburne from the point of view of the whole night. But at this moment Liliburne proposed to the President that, at the end of the third fight arranged on the programme, Lord Edgar's Gypsy should meet his own black-breasted red in a final deciding main. The President accepted this sporting proposal, which was quite customary at this period of the history of cocking, and the crowd were also very pleased. Lord Edgar was very angry.

'Damned if I'll take Liliburne's charity. Damned if I will,' he said, very firmly.

Hawkins pointed out, however, that it would be thought that he, Lord Edgar Brice, was not only being unsporting but also showing himself almost a coward if he did not agree to the President's proposition. So Lord Edgar reluctantly agreed, but said, 'I'll be damned glad if Gypsy is bashed to bits by the Newman bird before Liliburne can try any of his tricks with

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her.' He had a curious habit of referring to all his cocks as if they were feminine.

Lord Edgar's anger was such that he hardly saw Gypsy gain a clean victory over Newman's second bird in ten minutes. Gypsy's fighting technique was quite different from that of the brilliant black-breasted red. Instead of going ahead and attacking violently immediately, Gypsy was slower and more methodical, allowing the other bird to do the attacking, use up its energy and make mistakes. He always held his ground and returned blow for blow, always being certain that any real attempt to strike went home. He had fought already innumerable battles, and was now four years old. Newman's second bird was adventurous and ferocious in nature, being very angry and full of vitality, though somewhat highly strung. The first five minutes of the fight therefore was spent by Gypsy in trying to wear out the energy of his opponent, and even of receiving a blow or two. Then in the eighth minute Gypsy went into the fight for the first time and his opponent, instead of staying and fighting, turned round, showed a clean pair of heels and fled from the ring. There, in keeping with the treatment traditionally shown to cowardly birds, his neck was immediately wrung. Gypsy meantime was tenderly taken up from the floor by Hawkins and his minor wounds examined. In a few moments he could announce, to the delighted crowd, that Gypsy was fit to fight the black-breasted red in a deciding main.

Between each of the three fights there had been a quarter of an hour interval, during which it was the custom to place wagers and buy drinks at one or other of the bars. Ann Mullaly and Michael had during the first and second of these

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vainly tried to find Beasley, but he had gone off to another part of the cockpit.

'Your bodyguard,' the attendant had said with some suspicion to Michael, 'has gone off to where he can get a better view.'

However, in the third interval, immediately before the fight between the red-breasted black and Lord Edgar's Gypsy, Beasley reappeared below Lord Edgar's box. He attracted Ann Mullaly's attention. She went out to speak with him.

'Spending the night with the nobs?' said Beasley, smiling.

'Just the evening,' answered Ann Mullaly guiltily. 'We couldn't get out before.'

'Aha,' said Beasley, rolling a cigarette. Then he said, 'There's going to be some trouble later.'

'Is that why we were to meet here?'

'That's why.' Beasley paused. 'I don't quite approve of it, mind you, but there it is, we've got to go through with it. It's very important. There'll be a lot of trouble. A lot of trouble. You've got your rods?' Beasley always affected this curious expression of the burgling underworld when he spoke of firearms.

'I haven't. Michael has, of course.'

'Yes. Now I'll tell you what to do. Michael needn't know just now. You'll have to lead him to the right course.' Beasley smiled grimly.

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Michael was meanwhile exchanging words with Lord Edgar. He was surprised to find how relieved he was to be talking again to someone with whom he had associated in the old days.

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Ann Mullaly returned to Lord Edgar's box just at the start of the new fight. There was no doubt that this promised to be one of those mains which are remembered for several generations. The cocks seemed in some imperceptible way to be aware that not only were high stakes laid on them but that they expressed in some way the hopes and passions of a special moment in English history. At least, this was the impression that they gave as they strode round the pit. For at the beginning of this fight the two birds were not as usual placed beak to beak by the respective cockmasters, but allowed to strut around—as used to be done at certain exceptional periods in the past. Suddenly the black-breasted red saw Gypsy in the distance and in his customary style flew at him with his head down like a battering-ram. The crowd was undoubtedly on the side in general of Gypsy but nevertheless were intensely exhilarated by the violent appearance of the black-breasted red. The series of swift blows of the latter certainly surprised Lord Edgar's bird. Lord Edgar himself was almost mad with rage at the feeling that the crowd was against him. His anger indeed rose to such an extent indeed that Michael began to fear that he might have a stroke. The old man seemed to know precisely when Gypsy was retreating and when he was cleverly avoiding an attack. 'Ah, the beauty, that's for old Liliburne, that's the beauty,' he kept saying to himself as loud as he could. The roaring and crying of the crowd was by now unbelievable. Everyone had begun to take out their pocket handkerchiefs and to wave them with abandon. This was the sign that they were really appreciating a fight.

Meantime, over in Liliburne's box everyone seemed very happy. Only Dutton the cockmaster, standing in the pit itself, seemed a little downcast. For he knew that by now the

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black-breasted red should by all ordinary reckoning have won the fight. Lord Edgar's Gypsy was now covered with blood, he had been struck at least fifty times inside ten minutes, but still he was gamely fighting on, presumably conscious, in his own way, that cocks like the black-breasted red have to be fought in a particular manner. The black-breasted red was now clearly tiring, in fact. His rushes, though as vehement as before, were less frequent. Michael glanced across at Liliburne's box and everyone there was standing up, craning forward, pushing each other out of the way, clapping their hands, and, clearly, shouting at the top of their voices—though, in the general hullabaloo, what they actually said was not, of course, distinguishable above the noise of the crowd.

'There she goes, damn it,' cried Lord Edgar, looking madly into the air with his sightless eyes.

'Come on, beauty,' cried Hawkins.

'Gyp-sy, Gyp-sy, Gyp-sy,' the crowd began to cry out monotonously.

And indeed now at last it seemed that Gypsy was gaining her own. The black-breasted red was retreating, was itself covered with blood, was sustaining blow after blow. The Liliburne box looked thunderstruck. Liliburne himself was almost weeping. Suddenly the black-breasted red returned to the battle. With all its sharp violent energy it drove itself forwards, and, with four atrocious blows, felled Gypsy to the ground, and established itself in what seemed an impregnable position over him. He was sharply jabbing at his eyes. Gypsy lay prostrate. The black-breasted red stood firmly upwards apparently the winner. Almost it seemed as if he would crow. The shouting in the crowd died down. Only the clapping continued frenziedly from the Liliburne box. Sir Alfred was

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leaning out of the box, his top hat askew, clapping his hands fast and furiously. 'Damn' good bird,' he could be heard shouting across the pit. But then Lord Edgar's Gypsy reared suddenly from its apparent deathbed, and struck hard and fast into the underside of the black-breasted red with its silver spur. The Liliburne bird fell like a stone. Gypsy roused itself a second, the President's bell rang signifying that victor had been found in the main, and then Gypsy fell back dead on to the ground.

All this happened so fast that the mind could hardly take it in. But the next events were if anything swifter. From what seemed to be three sides of the cockpit, stentorian voices were heard calling through megaphones: 'So perish the cursed Jewish race! The Jews must die like cocks in a run! Down with the Jews!' And then, before anyone could take in this certainly unexpected announcement, fighting had begun in every corner of the rows of seats—presumably between those who were horrified by this appeal and those who welcomed it, or indeed had made it.

Pandemonium now broke out. It was difficult at first between whom precisely the battle was engaged. On the one hand, there seemed to be a group of anti-Jewish toughs who were being overcome by a mass of far less strong-looking but also far more numerous people of all sorts. On the other, it seemed that the fight had followed perfectly naturally from the excitement of the scene before. The violent tempers which the great cock main between the black-breasted red and Lord Edgar's Gypsy had excited was surely enough to cause a fight without any great provocation. Provocation! Certainly that was a word which one heard shouted aloud among the higher

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tiers of seats—a word drowned in the general roar of passions and anger. But who provoked whom? Did Beasley know, one wonders, or Ann Mullaly?

Down among the ringside seats most of the spectators were attempting vainly to escape from the cockpit itself. Attendants were trying to make a way for Liliburne and his party. Others were approaching Lord Edgar's and the President's boxes. Joseph Newman seemed to have already vanished, escaped or overcome perhaps by the fighting going on around where his box stood. All these fights were, of course, only with fists, so that no one could by this time have been killed though considering the violence with which people were being hit there was no doubt that many people would be seriously injured and have to go to hospital. Women and girls were among those who were down, and indeed some of the latter were now being flung bodily from the top of the row of seats towards the pit. It seemed very unlikely that they would pick themselves up again. Michael meantime was doing his best to push the fighters near him apart. This was not very successful, since no sooner had he turned to another group than those whom he had separated were back at each other again, hitting each other as if the pent-up violence of a generation was now loosed. Lord Edgar was standing on his seat listening to the noise of the fighting around him in precisely the same way as he had been listening to the noise of the cock main only a few minutes before. 'Come on, beauties,' he kept on muttering. 'Come on the rabble, come on, boys and girls, come on the rabble.' Meantime the anti-Jewish element in the crowd, who seemed now suddenly to be getting stronger, were beginning to cry, in the same monotonous rhythm that earlier they had

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cried 'Gyp-sy, Gyp-sy, Gyp-sy', were now shouting, 'Down with th' Jews, down with th' Jews, down with th' Jews!'

Heaven knows how long this battle would have gone on had it not been for the appearance—probably only ten minutes after the end of the last cock-fight—of an apparently endless stream of German soldiers. At one moment the battle seemed simply a legitimate descendant of, say, a nineteenth-century electoral contest; at the next it was a terrible scene from the tragedy of twentieth-century urban life. The German soldiers gathered, at first, in the stage of the cock-pit itself where there was, rather surprisingly, a large open space. Then they charged into the mob, dragging combatants apart with experienced hands. The inevitable then happened. The mass of those who had been fighting each other now turned on the common attacker. Within a few minutes the German soldiers were themselves at war with a howling mob of English men and women. The hoses and tear gas which they had brought to separate the combatants was now tacitly dropped. The Germans took to firearms.

The succeeding horror exceeded anything which the Germans had yet perpetrated in Britain. The maddened soldiery, no doubt angry by having to be so well mannered towards the conquered for so long, acted as if delighted by their instructions to shoot to kill. A pair of machine-gun posts were rapidly established in the centre of the cockpit. Within a trice, the raking fire of these weapons had caused hundreds of English men and women to drop wounded or dying on the upper tiers of the seats. The air was torn by the noise of screaming men and women. It was a massacre. Nobody in the crowd was armed, except for a handful of Resistance men such

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as Michael. Michael himself was shot in the right arm with the first volley of machine-gun fire and had dropped his revolver. Ann Mullaly attempted to steer him out of Lord Edgar's box, but the exit was partly choked with corpses. Michael himself had no wish to leave the battlefield. Lord Edgar beside him was encouraging the English to go on fighting, until a huge German felled him with the butt of a rifle. Michael knocked down the German though the difference between the two blows was that the German was only concussed, while Lord Edgar was dead. Next Michael thrust his way through a now hysterical group of Germans and made for the machine guns. The Germans did not take in Michael's appearance since they assumed that their enemies were all farther away from them than the ringside. Michael indeed succeeded in kicking over the first machine gun before the Germans understood what precisely he was trying to do. When they realized this at last, there of course seemed little hope for him. But at this moment the whole building in which the Cockpit Royal had been housed now caught fire. A great gust of flame broke out of the upper tiers. The Germans received a sharp order to retreat—a command which in fact they were already anticipating. Michael succeeded, in the confusion, in escaping from the impossible position in which he had found himself through the door at the back of the President's box. There was no more that he could do. Reaching the door of the box, and seeing indeed the street ahead of him only ten yards, he turned back to take a final glance at the scene which he was leaving. The choking fumes of the smoke, the screaming and weeping of the dying, the bright flames, the appalling spectacle of the dead, caused the Cockpit Royal

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to seem some terrible illustration by Doré of the Last Judgement. Shuddering, Michael left. A curious and unnatural quiet reigned in the street. German armoured cars were driving up every minute, hoses were at work, there was in fact a great deal of noise and confusion but hell itself would have seemed an orderly place in comparison with what he had left behind.

Only now did Michael reflect on what had happened to Ann Mullaly and to Beasley. But the terrible nightmare quality of the whole scene inside the Cockpit Royal was such that he could only feel stunned and appalled, leaving him no time even for private anxiety or remorse. A private fear seemed irrelevant in a general cataclysm. Michael made his way to the river. The Embankment was deserted. He walked for many hours along the edge of the Thames until eventually he returned home to Albany. To his surprise, though, such was his state of mind, hardly to his delight, Ann Mullaly was there waiting anxiously for him. Both she and Beasley had got away successfully from the charnel house at Westminster. Both were appalled at what they had done. For indeed, the communist section of the Resistance had provoked the violence in the Cockpit Royal. It had been members of the party who had first given the cry against the Jews which had fired the riots. The aims had been to create an incident, to involve the German troops, to cause the banning of cocking and to produce a thrill of horror against the occupying powers to spread through the nation. But no one had had any idea that these things would happen so terribly.

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After this time, the occupying forces and the English nation watched each other with terrible hatred. The old days when collaboration could be regarded as reasonable were over. And cock-fighting, the symbol of the honeymoon era of the Occupation, was once more banned. This time, it seemed, the cock main was definitely finished so far as the English nation was concerned.



MICHAEL waited one night some weeks later in the Black Cock Inn in Lower Thames Street. His wound sustained at the Cockpit Royal had been cured. He was waiting for a blind man with a mandolin. This messenger would take him to the meeting of the council of the Resistance at which he was to put his complaint about the incident at Lady Stoll's dinner. The deliberately poetic character of the rendezvous rather irritated him. If he was going to have to enact a scene from the 'Waste Land', he would have preferred to have waited in the Cannon Street Hotel for a Bradford millionaire. Idly he wondered what had happened to T. S. Eliot. He had not heard, and it was extraordinary that he had not thought about the matter before. He was presumably in Bangor or Welwyn—more likely Welwyn. Only the Jews as a rule went to Bangor. 'Riding down to Bangor,' he hummed idly to himself. He turned to buy another half-pint of bitter. It was wretched stuff, Occupation ale, and he thought somewhat guiltily of his still well-filled cellar under his flat in the Albany. Where the devil, though, was the blind man with the mandolin? He began to wonder whether it had not been Upper Thames Street where the rendezvous had been. That afternoon he had asked Miss Plaice, his secretary at Farquhar and Watson, to look out a copy of Eliot's work, and he had read through the 'Waste Land' again, with just as much pleasure as when he

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had first looked at it, such hundreds of years ago under the elm trees at Stowe. Unfortunately, and this seemed likely to be a drawback in the Resistance, he had always had a bad memory for verse. He drank a little more beer, and frowned. Invariably punctual himself, he felt that to be kept waiting was nothing more than a form of deliberate insult, a way of showing him that he was still a minor member of the organization. He looked round the pub. Nobody in it seemed in any way blind. There was no mandolin. There were about half a dozen people in the bar: an old man sitting with his hat on behind a lime and lager; two old women sitting behind large glasses of stout. A woman of about fifty sat on a bar stool, flirting with the barman. And a little way down the bar a man of about the same age flirted with a bar girl. Then suddenly, just as he was thinking of leaving, he heard unmistakably the whine of a stringed instrument from the public bar. Looking across from where he was—in the saloon bar—he couldn't quite see where the music was coming from. He could see just a corner of the public bar, but not by any means all of it. Cursing himself that he had not thought of going into the public bar first he went out again into the dark street and back into the pub through the other entrance. His heart was pounding as he saw, yes, a small man with dark glasses with what appeared to be a mandolin. He was singing, in a quavering voice, to his own music:

'London pride has been handed down to us
London pride is a flower that's free
London pride means our own dear town to us
And our pride it forever will be.'

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He paused and then went on:

'Gay lady
Mayfair in the morning
Hear her footsteps echo
In the lonely street
Gay lady
When the day is dawning
Hear the policeman's footsteps
On his lonely beat.'

Dangerous stuff, thought Michael. Then he went to join the circle standing round the blind man. There was a little short man looking like a clerk. There was a navvy. And there was a tart. There was no doubt whatever that she was a tart. Just a jolly old-fashioned tart, Michael thought. He felt a little conspicuous joining them, but at any rate he did so. The group widened like an oyster to embrace him.

The blind man finished his song. The group split apart, the tart going over to the bar, the clerk and the navvy standing aside to talk. The old man went round the four of them with his hat. When he reached Michael he whispered very quickly: 'Cross the river by Tower Bridge. Turn left and walk along Tooley Street into Jamaica Road. When you reach St Anne's Church, Southwark, turn left up Cathay Street. That'll take you to the river again. You'll find yourself at the Angel Inn, Rotherhithe Street. Turn right there and up Masterman Street on the left you'll find a group of Queen Anne houses. The third of these is numbered fifty-three. Knock three times.' The blind man went on round the bar. Michael looked up to see the tart, the navvy and the clerk, all three, looking at him very curiously. Could they have heard? He thought not.

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Number 53 Masterman Street. A Queen Anne house on the river's edge. That was all there was to it. The rest of the instructions were bound to complicate things. Michael pulled his raincoat round him and set off down Lower Thames Street.

He had got as far as the Tower when he thought he heard footsteps behind him. He paused. The footsteps continued and then stopped too. Yes, he was right, he was being followed. What to do? He walked quickly on past the Bloody Tower. The Tower itself at this period was being redecorated, to allow for its use as a suitable headquarters for the Fuehrer on his visit to London. Scaffolding had been set up over the greater part of the edifice. The moat was being filled with water. Yet the bridge itself offered a far better place to try and settle accounts with his pursuer. Michael hastened his step. On the middle of the bridge he waited, behind one of the great brick pillars which kept up the Gothic turrets of Sir John Wolfe Barry's famous construction. As in peacetime, the two ends of the bridge were guarded by policemen. While Michael had no doubt that his pursuer was an agent of the occupying authority he did not suppose that he was prepared for an immediate explanation with them as a result of any open brawl. What his pursuers wanted, Michael surmised, was to know where he was going without him knowing that they knew. Meantime the footsteps from the Tower grew louder. A second later the clerk from the Black Cock in Lower Thames Street strode into view. So it was him, the clerk. He suddenly saw Michael, instinctively checked his step, and then walked on. Michael allowed him to go halfway across the Bridge. Then he followed him. The silhouettes of the two men, pursued now following pursuer, showed up along the parapet of the bridge against a sky criss-crossed a thousand

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times with the masts and funnels of big ships. A fog-horn sounded mournfully in the Pool of London. Michael quickened his step once more.

At the other southern end of Tower Bridge a narrow, lower street runs along the edge of the Thames in the direction of Rotherhithe and Greenwich. At the top of a flight of steps which descends to this lower road, Michael's pursuer halted, lighting a cigarette. There was no one else about. Michael nodded to the man and made as if to walk down the steps. As he did so, he turned suddenly, drew out his right hand from his raincoat pocket and punched the man squarely on the jaw. The clerk fell back, astonished. Michael stopped him from falling, but pushed him head foremost down the steps down which he had himself set out to walk. The man fell all the way down, some thirty feet, crumpled up and lay still at the bottom. In the dead silence of the London night Michael walked on quickly into Tooley Street.

He had walked for nearly twenty minutes and was already halfway down the long straight dull stretch of the Jamaica Road when he became aware of yet another pursuer. This time it seemed to him that he was being followed by a motor-car. About a hundred yards behind, a pair of headlights seemed to be hugging the kerb. Since there were no turns in Jamaica Road, Michael could not immediately think of a means of surprising his follower—if indeed follower it was. He had reached St Anne's, Southwark, and the turn up Cathay Street, before he was able to find a means of doing so. He walked past the turning and up the next turn into Paradise Street. He waited two minutes and then walked back into Jamaica Road. The following car had almost reached him. He walked sharply towards it. As he suspected, a woman sat inside. It was the

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'tart' from the Black Cock. She smiled at him from the driving-seat of the car. He hesitated but made no answer even with his eyes. She opened the door of the car and stretched out a hand towards him. 'Come and have a nice time, dearie,' she said. Michael took the outstretched hand and got in. Muffled in her fur coat, the woman was now very much taken aback. Presumably, Michael thought, she was not a real prostitute, but it could hardly have been difficult for her to have made herself look like one.

'Well,' he said, 'where are you going to take me?' As he did so, he looked into the back of the car. He was relieved to find that there was no one else there. The woman did not answer. It was clear that she was terrified of the situation she had become involved in.

'Listen,' said Michael. 'I got into this car because I don't like being followed. Do you understand?'

'I don't know what you're talking about.'

'How surprising,' Michael said. 'But intelligence will not be very necessary to follow what I want you to do. In fact, the reverse.'

'What do you want?' asked the woman.

Michael had in his pocket a small Colt revolver. Although he had no intention of using it (for the time being, at any rate), he placed it against the woman's ribs and said: 'Now drive. Drive fast. Just keep driving.'

The woman began to start the car.

'Keep going,' said Michael. 'Keep going.'

They had driven about five miles down the Jamaica Road, and, indeed, were almost at Greenwich, when Michael said, 'Now stop.'

The woman stopped.

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'Now get out.'

'What do you mean?'

'Get out,' said Michael sternly. He pressed the revolver into the woman's ribs. She obeyed mechanically. Michael moved over into the driving-seat. The woman stood irresolute in the middle of the road. Michael got the feel of the car, and slowly turned it round. 'Now I tell you,' he said to the woman, who stood still numb with fear, 'if you telephone anyone about what's happened I'll come and shoot you wherever you are. Understand? Wherever you are.' This threat seemed to be taken completely seriously by the woman. She stood and watched as Michael put his foot down on the accelerator and drove fast back towards London.

About two hundred yards short of Cathay Street, he stopped. No one seemed to be following him. Not on the road anyway. Michael got out of the car, fumbled with the keys till he was able to lock it, and began to walk on to Cathay Street. In a telephone box on the corner he saw the heavy figure of the navvy, the third man of the Black Cock in Lower Thames Street. He was facing the other way to Michael, but was easily recognizable by his great height. Michael took a quick decision. He flung open the door of the telephone box, and brought the butt of his revolver down as hard as he could on the navvy's head. The big man dropped like a child.

Michael was now at last able to proceed with his journey to the headquarters of the Resistance. Walking down Cathay Street, he turned to the right, as instructed, by the Angel Inn, and found himself, as he had been told, before a row of Queen Anne houses. They were low-lying and beyond, clearly, was the river. At Number 53 he stopped. He knocked three times. The door was opened by a small, old woman, who immediately

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led him up a flight of narrow stairs. They passed through two rooms which for all the world seemed like any ordinary working-class dwelling. In the bedroom, a ladder led up to the loft. The woman pointed. Michael climbed up. He found himself in a large, well-lit room, with its windows facing on to the river. Around a long refectory table sat about a dozen men. A tall sandy-haired man got up from among this group, smiled, and said: 'Michael? I thought it must be you when I heard your name. Remember me? I was Hume at Stowe. Hume major.'

6

THE council of the Resistance at this time was composed of two socialists, two communists, three trade unionists, and five independents. The latter represented broadly the group which might have been conservative before the war. Indeed, one of them had once been a conservative Member of Parliament. The other four independents were a business man, a vicar of a south London parish, a doctor and an ex-lecturer in philosophy at London University. The socialists and trade unionists were working-class men. They were older than everyone else present. While no one would have denied the great qualities of their leader, Bill Arkwright, few also would have questioned the fact that his powers were declining, that this great white-headed tribune of the people, with his golden voice and blue eyes, was not only a shadow of his former self but was in fact almost a prisoner of the two other members of the Central Council: Thomas Latimer and John Macneice, the two communists. But while Arkwright was old, Latimer and Macneice were young—young enough even to have been his grandchildren. Both also were middle-class men. In every other way they too represented a contrast. Thomas Latimer was a large, untidy, semi-genius, semi-charlatan, still only twenty-two (though he looked thirty-two at least). He was the sort of man who as a boy had clearly started to shave at twelve. He ambled rather than walked, talked incessantly, sometimes

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as if he were an artist more than a politician. Macneice was thin, sparing of words, small, almost effeminate, intense in everything he said. He was also only in his early twenties. At the start of the war he had been a science student at the London School of Economics.

Michael sat in a chair with the members of the council facing him and also on his three sides. It was very like having an interview for a job. In the chair immediately opposite him was the trade unionist who was the president of the council for the time being—each member took it in turn to preside for a month at a time. Michael was asked to state his case and he did so. He began by mentioning the shooting of Gawthorp, and the great fillip which this had given to the movement. He then said that he thought that he had a right to more careful treatment than that which he had received while in Lady Stoll's house. He might easily have been killed, he said, and he demanded an enquiry which would say why it was that no one had taken the trouble to find out whether he was present there.

His first interrogator was the philosophy professor.

'Could you tell the council why indeed you were present in the house of Lady Stoll, a notorious *collaborateur*?'

'In order to discover what I could of the mind of the enemy. I have sent in a report on my findings which the council may have seen.'

'I should tell you frankly that I am not convinced that you have any right morally to eat the meat of Lady Stoll in company with Field Marshal Hassel and Sir Albert Rook,' said the professor of philosophy somewhat ruthlessly, fixing him with a very beady eye through his large and heavy spectacles.

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The provincialism of dons! Michael thought. This is really jealousy of my social position!

'I incline to that view also,' said the vicar. He was wearing his dog-collar rather tight round his neck, and while he was speaking Michael fixed his eye firmly upon this part of his clothing. It was becoming clear to him that he could not count upon the support of those whom he should have thought would have been naturally his closest supporters, speaking simply in terms of class. He hoped that Ann Mullaly had done what she could to bring the communists to support him.

'Any comments, comrade Latimer?' asked the chairman. The question of address in the council was a most vexed one, and it customarily took up half an hour at the start of any meeting. The proletarian parties insisted on calling themselves by the name 'comrade' and the other groups violently denounced their right to use what they thought of as party usages in a non-party or supra-party body.

'It is obvious,' said Latimer, 'that the comrade has a genuine complaint. Whether or not there was negligence is a matter for the enquiry. It is clear that an enquiry must be held.'

The other communist, Macneice, followed by giving his support, in terms more restrained but none the less firmly. Arkwright, the socialists and the trade unionists followed the communists. So Michael had seven clear votes in his favour. This being so, the other independents did not speak. When the vote came there were only three (all independents, as he expected) against him and seven in favour. The vicar and the conservative Member of Parliament abstained.

There followed a certain amount of wrangling about who was to form the commission of enquiry. Eventually it was

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agreed that Macneice, the philosophy don and Hume would be the members.

This conversation was carried on before a magnificent view of the River Thames. To the left, Michael could see Tower Bridge and the Tower itself. Ahead lay Execution Dock. All around were barges, boats and big ships. Fog-horns moaned incessantly. Occasionally, these were interrupted by the noise of river hooters. Precisely, however, as the discussion of Michael's case ended, and the members of the council were preparing, like any other committee, to move on to the next item of the agenda, these comforting river noises were interrupted by the slam of a door, followed by the sound of hurrying feet. In a moment a small boy, tattered and exhausted, had flung himself into the room.

'There! There!' he exclaimed. 'They're coming! They're coming!'

'Who? Who are they?' Thomas Latimer, though the youngest man in the room, seized immediate charge.

'The Germans. The Germans are coming.'

'Where are they?'

'Armoured cars. Lots of them. In Jamaica Road.'

Latimer turned round to his colleagues.

'Gentlemen,' he said, and everyone noticed how in this moment of crisis he dropped the use of the proletarian greeting of 'comrade' which he had always insisted upon, 'gentlemen, it seems that we have been discovered. Perhaps even we have been betrayed.'

'Betrayal, betrayal,' exclaimed several voices.

'We must have an immediate enquiry, comrades,' said Macneice.

'But they are coming. They are coming,' cried the small

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boy, infuriated almost to tears that the council were not acting on his warning, and were not trying to make good their escape.

'The boy is right,' said Michael, feeling in this moment that he had as much right as anyone to speak.

'Surely,' said the conservative Member of Parliament, 'this gentleman is not able to address the council on matters other than his own case?'

Michael was about to reply when a series of knocks at the door rendered this conversation academic. The old woman who had let Michael into the house came running upstairs, terrified, clutching the small boy who had brought the news of the imminence of the German arrival. He turned out to be her grandson.

'It's all blowing up, it's all blowing up!' she screamed.

'Keep quiet, everyone,' ordered Thomas Latimer, seeking to establish himself as the leader of the group.

'Keep quiet?' demanded the conservative member. 'Are you crazy?'

'Comrades, comrades,' exclaimed old Bill Arkwright.

The knocking meantime had become imperceptibly converted into blows.

'They're breaking the door in!' screamed the old woman.

Still no one could think of anything to do.

'We'll fight to the end,' shouted the vicar down the stairs. But as he spoke the tramp of many men could be heard entering the house, coming up the stairs.

'We're betrayed, undoubtedly we're betrayed,' said Macneice.

'For God's sake don't worry about that now,' said Michael, who had brought out both his revolver and his knife. He

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wondered whether in any way he could be blamed for this catastrophe. Had the clerk perhaps recovered from his fall? Had the tart followed him? What of the navy?

A guttural voice now shouted up from down below.

'If you surrender quietly you will all be fairly tried before a military tribunal. If not, you will all be shot within the quarter-hour. Quickly, decide, gentlemen of the Resistance!'

'What do we do, Padre?' asked the trade unionist who had been the chairman of the meeting.

'What you can, my dear sir, what you can,' answered the vicar of St Michael's.

'Gentlemen, I take it that we are agreed that we shall fight to the end?' demanded Thomas Latimer.

A great cry of 'yes' rang through the room. The old woman burst into tears, and the small boy ran screaming to the window facing the river. He threw open the window, balanced for a time on the ledge and then flung himself into the icy river. The conservative Member of Parliament did the same. From below, several SS men began to mount the ladder. Michael was standing by the aperture and began to fire down the stairs. As he did so, the floor of the room was ripped into splinters by a ripple of machine-gun fire from below. The professor of philosophy fell to the floor mortally wounded. 'I'm gone,' he said quite quietly. No one heeded him. The room began to fill with smoke as the firing became general. Four SS men succeeded in forcing their way up the stairs. The confusion became intense. The old woman uttered a piercing shriek as she was shot down at the window. No one could quite see what was happening. And then the whole house, which was made of wood, caught fire. Bodies lay about

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in heaps among the flames. Michael kept on firing, nevertheless, and for a moment he thought that he might clear the room of Germans. But each time he shot one, two more would appear up the staircase. Thomas Latimer was down, Macneice was down, all the trade unionists were down, the vicar was down. Suddenly Michael felt himself alone, surrounded by flames, the dying, and the crash of falling, blazing beams. He was now only a few feet himself from the window. Judging that he could do no more inside the house, he kicked his way to the window-sill, turned to fire once again back through the smoke, pushed aside the dead body of the old woman, and flung himself off into the darkness. He had no idea how far the river was, or how deep it was. But this uncertainty seemed superior to the certainty of death in the blazing house.

The dive seemed interminably long. He seemed to be falling through space rather than simply through the Thames-side air. It was like a dream of flight. At last he entered the water. Down, down, down into the dirt, the sewage and the currents. His head hit the muddy bottom of the river and, shaken, he began to rise to the surface. When he did rise, he became immediately conscious of a powerful beam of light playing on the water, in search no doubt of him and of any others still swimming. A motor launch was approaching from the direction of the Tower. Michael took a deep breath and began to swim under water towards the opposite bank.

The tide was going out. His clothes seemed a drag and he dropped off his shoes and his jacket. But still the water seemed to play with him, seemed to tug at him, to pull him downwards into its own muddy embrace. He recalled the young men who tried to bathe in the Thames in the last years before the

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First World War, how the boating party was interrupted by tragedy. Grimly he swam on, occasionally coming to the surface for air. On about the tenth time that he did this, he found himself in the middle of the light cast by the beam from the shore. He shook his head, dazzled. A burst of exclamations, followed by firing, came from the shore. He sank down again, preferring the danger of the currents to that of the machine guns. The launch seemed far away still, but so too did the opposite bank.

And then he found himself nearly across the river. One final effort, he told himself, and he would be across. But this final effort was not easy. The current seemed to get stronger and stronger as he neared the other side. He gave up attempts to escape from the searchlight, and swam on with bullets all around him. He now dreaded the thought of going under again. But then suddenly the current became almost irresistible, and he was dragged right down, down, down, like a corkscrew entering a cork, swallowing all the time muddy water, and gulping fiercely. Down, down, down among the dead men, he muttered to himself. But then, paradoxically, he seemed to rise once more, of his own accord more than by any effort of his own limbs. He came to the surface. And the light seemed also to have been taken away. A new strength came to him. He struck out with all his power. He was across.

He managed to climb on to a wharf. There he lay, totally exhausted. The Germans, the Resistance, the Occupation, all were forgotten. He was across the river. And now to lie, blissfully at peace, on this old wharf. But what was this? Hands were there. Someone was lifting him up. Whose were these? Whose hands could they be? The question was beyond Michael. He relaxed into unconsciousness.

7

KATIA NOTT had been living since her first night away from home with Maria and Lionel Strachey. She would go down every night from Bloomsbury to the Twilight Press after dinner. Deliberately, she had tried, though without success, to tone down her looks. Maria Strachey lent her a certain quantity of what she described as sensible clothes—for, though both were unusually tall, they were almost the same size. But Katia could not help looking very well even in these, somewhat to Maria Strachey's annoyance.

On the night of the terrible events in Rotherhithe, Katia had gone along to the Twilight Press at her usual time of ten o'clock. She had checked through the proof of the next edition of the Resistance's campaign notes. She was curiously good at spelling and much enjoyed the improvement of style and the correction of minor points of syntax. Clarence Connolly would walk about the room in a general haze of composition. Occasionally he would break out into a sentence, which Katia would take down. Clarence would have a large number of ideas each day, nearly all of which would come to nothing, but which would, as he put it, 'lose nothing from being aired'.

Towards the end of this grey evening of winter, Clarence asked Katia to go to see Judith to pick up some copy for the spring book supplement of the Twilight Press's daily newspaper. Katia agreed to do this on her way home, though of

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course Mount Street, the address of Judith's new apartment, was far from being on her way home from the Stracheys in Bloomsbury.

Katia had just left the Twilight Press and was, indeed, at top of Swan's Court when she heard a great noise of slamming of doors and of people leaving cars. She turned back to see the four black vans ominously parked outside the small tobacconist's shop where the Twilight Press was housed. As she watched, she saw to her horror that armed policemen were escorting into the vans the unmistakable figures of Clarence Connolly and Beatrice Fairfax-Moss. Katia stood thunderstruck. Even as she watched, she had the presence of mind to reflect that it was typical that the Gestapo—if Gestapo it were—was acting according to rule in taking four vans to arrest two people. Her second thought was to tell herself that the Resistance had been betrayed. It did not occur to her, that is, that the arrest of her friends at the Twilight Press could be the result of anything except treachery. Her final thought was that it was essential despite this evident disaster to 'carry on', to continue with the programme earlier decided upon. Partly from a desire for flight, therefore, but also because she desired to carry out Clarence Connolly's final injunctions, Katia immediately set out for Mount Street.

8

STRICHNER arrived late that night at Judith's. He was tired. Even the sight of his little Jewess failed to stir him.

'It has been a hard day, Herr Strichner?' Judith asked as she poured out the whisky.

'Yes, a hard day.' He smiled a little wearily. 'A lot of things have happened. We have closed your great public school, Eton. The headmaster has been carrying on pro-semitic propaganda. He has been sent to Bangor. And so, I am glad to say, have most of the boys. They are a diseased group, the Herrenvolk of this country. Lord Rosebery, for example, is the son of a Jewess.' He brought out this last piece of information apropos of nothing in particular. 'But, as a matter of fact,' Strichner said, beaming, 'we have done something even more remarkable today. We have wiped out the whole of the Resistance.'

'Really,' said Judith, without batting an eyelid, 'and how did you do this?'

'Yes, yes,' Strichner said, obviously proud of himself, 'we have wiped out all the foulest nests of bolshevist anarchy in this country. England will be a far cleaner place tomorrow than it has ever been. Their printing press even has been discovered and uprooted.'

Even Judith was brought up short at this terrible news.

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'You start, my darling? You are surprised at your clever Herr Strichner?'

'I have always thought you capable of almost anything,' Judith said. She had insisted all the time on using Strichner's surname, and now he had been brought to accept this as a pleasing joke. But she was taken aback only for a moment. She quickly returned to what she realized to be the main point. How had they discovered the whereabouts of the Twilight Press?

'How did you do it, Herr Strichner?'

'Ah ha ha, always so interested in our secrets, little one. What will you do for Herr Strichner if he tells you? For it is interesting news that I could tell you, I promise you. Something very, very interesting.'

Judith came a little closer to him. 'Anything,' she whispered.

'Does it mean so much to you?' His hand caressed her knee.

'I like to know everything about you,' she answered, 'it helps me to help you.'

'Even military secrets.'

'If they mean much to you, they must mean much to me too.'

'Yes, I suppose there is that about it.'

Strichner got up, and walked to the small cocktail cabinet which he had fitted into the wall. He looked round the room and into the bedroom beyond it. He saw the bed, with its red eiderdown, and the Cézanne which he had bought on Judith's insistence. He supposed that he ought to tell her his extraordinary news. The fact was even he was rather surprised by it. Even he had not quite decided what to do with this piece of information. He came back sharply to Judith.

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'We found out the whereabouts of the meeting of the Council of the Resistance this evening,' he said, 'through an informer. A certain man (whose identity we have not established) was told to be at a certain inn, in the City, at a certain time. Three of our agents were there. So as to satisfy his doubts, each of the three allowed themselves to be put out of action by him. We had heard that this man would lead us to a meeting of the Resistance. We were told by a secret, a double—perhaps even a treble—agent. Where he got his information we do not know—or care. It was certainly good information. Undoubtedly the Resistance was this evening betrayed by some of its friends. Honestly, *liebchen*, I am shocked. I, leader of the Gestapo, am shocked, shocked to the core! And so, I see, are you.'

Judith was certainly shocked. She was about to make some ordinary comment, one of those ordinary comments of which she was the master, when there was a ring at the door.

'Who can that be?' demanded Strichner sharply.

'I do not know,' said Judith, alarmed. On a night like this anything might happen. It was a night of disaster on every side. Who could it be? She went to the door. As she did so, Strichner went into the bedroom. Judith unbolted the door. It was Katia.

'Oh, Katia,' was all Judith could say.

9

I INSIST on the death penalty, Sir Stanley,' Mary Bright-Smith was saying. 'After all, if you do not shoot the organizers of the Twilight Press you may as well shut up shop. You make a laughing stock of us all. We do our best to found the regime on a firm basis. But what do you do? Jib at logic! Jib at logic, my dear Sir Stanley!'

'Even so, I cannot quite bring myself to act so precipitately. Let the men be tried. Warren——'

'Warren thinks as I do,' snapped the leader of the English women's Nazi Party.

'And then I should like to discuss the likely effects on Church opinion with Father Fairlie,' went on Sir Stanley Jackson.

'Stuff and nonsense. Really, you'll forgive my language, I hope, Sir Stanley, you'll forgive my language. But this is really a serious matter, you know, a serious matter.'

'Yes, I suppose it is. I really suppose it is.' Sir Stanley looked pained.

'What we want,' gabbled Mary Bright-Smith, 'is to have them all three shot and their bodies left in open, obvious places, to *encourager les autres*. I am telling you,' she said, 'I want to destroy these centres of resistance to us. And what do you do? You seem to forget that we are fighting a war.'

Sir Stanley shook his head.

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'While I am Prime Minister,' he said, 'men will not be shot without trial. Good night, Miss Bright-Smith.'

That formidable woman left the room fuming.

When she had gone, Sir Stanley lifted the receiver of his internal telephone.

'Those prisoners from the 'Twilight Press,' he said. 'Be good enough to have them transferred immediately to the concentration camp at Welwyn. Yes, tonight. Thank you.' He replaced the receiver. He sighed, glanced at a reflection of himself in a long mirror, noted the long pouches beneath his eyes and returned to his papers. After all, the King's Government had to go on.

10

THE Marylebone Communist Party executive had been sitting almost all the evening. It was their night for a committee meeting. Just when they were getting through the last part of their regular business, the news of the disaster at Rotherhithe began to come through. One of their agents reported confused fighting in the Rotherhithe area. Telephones would not work. At about twenty to eleven, the small boy who had brought the news of the Germans' arrival in the area and who had been the first to swim across the river succeeded in reaching a telephone box in the Wapping area. He managed to blurt out a circumstantial account of the events of the evening. At about eleven itself the news came of the capture of the Twilight Press.

The Marylebone Communist Party executive took these items of news with remarkable calm. In Beasley's absence the intellectual Craig was acting as chairman. Ann Mullaly and Edwards were the only two others of the executive present, since Thomas was known to be being used on a secret mission by the party during that evening.

Edwards watched Ann Mullaly as the news came in of the battle of Rotherhithe. He knew that she regarded Michael as her own responsibility, that she was preparing him as a party member. And now here was the suspicion, almost the certainty, that Michael had been killed. Edwards watched Ann Mullaly

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very closely, very closely indeed. He suspected her of something more than interest in Michael, something approaching affection. For everyone in the Marylebone party knew that Michael and Ann had slept together on the night of Gawthorp's murder. He, Edwards, had his eye on Ann Mullaly as well. And when he watched Ann Mullaly he was bound to admit to himself that she was taking Michael's apparent death very well. So well indeed that she did not seem to worry at all. Well, well, well, that needed some thinking about.

Aloud he said: 'I don't know what you think, comrade chairman, but I am convinced that there must be some kind of treachery at work here. Some kind of treachery seems to be the explanation. The loss of such valiant comrades as Michael, Latimer and Macneice'—he paused at the mention of the first name—'needs some explanation, some very careful explanation. Doesn't the boy who escaped across the river have any ideas on that matter?'

'I don't think, comrades,' said Craig, 'that that is a matter which has yet been ascertained.' Craig was surprised at himself how he had taken over not only the chairmanship of the local party from Beasley but also his vocabulary. He always now used words much longer than those which were necessary.

'Were there any survivors of the Rotherhithe disaster?' asked Ann Mullaly, speaking deliberately in low key.

'That, comrades, is another matter which has yet to be ascertained,' said Craig.

'What action does this committee now suggest will be undertaken?' asked Edwards.

'Well, of course, comrades, there will have to be a new Central Council of the Resistance. This body must be assumed to be already in existence. The alternate delegates of the

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deceased members will automatically step into the places of the deceased. This would mean that I and comrade Mullaly will take the places of comrades Macneice and Latimer,' Craig smiled genially. 'That would suggest that comrade Edwards should consider preparing himself for the office of chairman of this branch. Unless, that is, comrade Edwards feels that the duties consequent upon such an elevation would be too onerous. In which case alternative arrangements will have to be considered.'

'I don't know about that,' said Edwards hotly.

'Very well, then, there's no need to get excited, comrade.'

'I'm not getting excited, comrade chair, I would have thought that it would have been you, comrade chair, which——'

'Comrades, comrades,' exclaimed Ann Mullaly.

Craig and Edwards looked at each other reproachfully. In the silence the telephone rang.

Craig took the call. 'Uh-huh?' Voices could be heard gabbling fast on the other end. 'Uh-huh!' Craig said. He listened for a long time. 'Right, then, we'll send her down immediately.' He replaced the receiver. He turned back triumphantly to his two comrades. 'Very good news for us all. I have received intelligence,' he said, 'that candidate-comrade Michael survived the fighting. He succeeded in crossing the Thames, and was succoured on the other side by certain responsible members of the Wapping Labour Party. I have said that comrade Mullaly, for whom he has been asking, will leave immediately for Wapping and bring back the comrade to this address. Take my car, comrade Mullaly, if you like. We shall all be interested to know the details of these events.'

If Edwards expected any reaction to this news on the face of Ann Mullaly, he was disappointed. She accepted the task

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allotted to her without a flicker of emotion being allowed to cross her face. She's a tough one, thought Edwards.

After Ann Mullaly had gone, Craig said: 'Well, I don't know what you feel like, but I don't think we ought to adjourn this meeting just yet. It seems to me that we should remain in permanent session on a night like this.'

'Agreed,' said Edwards sullenly.

'Any opposition?' Craig asked, perfectly solemnly.

Since there was no one to oppose this idea, the motion was carried.

'Any other business?' asked Craig. Then he added: 'Of course, if there were a Mrs Craig, we would have coffee and biscuits at this juncture. Since, as comrade Edwards will have realized, this is not, unfortunately, the case, such a plan cannot be implemented.'

'Understood,' said Edwards.

'Now perhaps we ought to consider, while we are awaiting fresh news of the movements of the interior front, the question of reaching local ward agreements with the Marylebone Labour Party. Since our aim is to achieve a united front, we must consider at all times how such arrangements can be hastened. Are we agreed so far, comrade Edwards?'

II

KATIA hesitated on Judith's doorstep. What a strange, lavish apartment! *Un salon doré d'un luxe insolent*, she murmured to herself. She was embarrassed.

'Come in,' Judith said, now recovering her self-possession. 'Have a drink.'

Now at this point Strichner came out of the bedroom. Being dressed in a dark suit, and with his face being not generally familiar in the country where he was the supreme power, Katia did not recognize him. But she realized, from the funny little clipped, polite way that he greeted her, that he must be a foreigner. A German? Surely not, with Judith? Yet it would explain certain things about Judith if she had a powerful protector. Katia frowned, smiled, and then took the drink which Judith offered her.

'Oh,' she said to Judith, 'I was just passing by.'

'Do you live nearby?' asked Strichner agreeably.

'Oh yes, not far,' muttered Katia. It was absurd how childish Katia is, thought Judith. And yet at the same time she rather envied her freshness, the speed with which she would flush, the emotional level at which she obviously lived. Strichner was quite pleased at Katia's arrival. He liked to think of himself as a man with a mistress, someone to show off to others, especially to be able to appear in front of other pretty women as if he did not need them, being already himself

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happy in that way. But both Judith and Katia were at this moment unable to relax. Strichner, with his well-developed knowledge of human nature, observed this. What did it mean? Who was this Katia? Surely he had seen her before? And he had, though not in the flesh, since, when visiting Jules Nott in Hampstead he had noticed a large and handsome portrait of Katia on the stairs up to the studio and he had even seen a photograph of Katia in the hall. Yet he was a man almost without visual sense. Though clearly possessed of a powerful imagination, an imagination which itself almost gave him adequate physical relief, he could not recognize a woman from a portrait of her—rather as certain tone-deaf people, more often, are unable to pitch a note from one struck on a piano. Katia, Katia? She seemed familiar to him, but he could not recognize her.

‘Oh, Judith, I did come to ask you about some dress material,’ said Katia at last, ‘but it doesn’t matter. It really doesn’t matter. I’ll come in in the morning or early next week. No, really, I must fly. I really must. You know how difficult it is to find taxis on nights like these. I really must go.’ And go she did, puzzled at the scene which she had interrupted, and leaving Strichner and, to a lesser extent, Judith, puzzled too.

Katia’s first inclination on leaving Judith was to go home to Maria Strachey’s. She had that intention when she eventually did find a taxi, in Park Lane. But she did not do so. Somewhat to her own surprise, she ordered the driver to go to her old house in Hampstead. She arrived when it was nearly midnight. ‘It’s along on the left,’ she told the driver. And then, when she saw the lights coming from the house, she thought to herself how unnecessary it was to give such an order. For there were lights blazing from every window of the house. All the lights

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were on, even on the top floor. What could be going on there? How astounding! And there was music! What could Jules be doing? She paid the taxi, and went to the front door. She rang the bell. Her heart pounding, she waited.

It was Mrs Carpenter who came to the door.

'Oh, madam, madam!' she exclaimed. 'Have you come home? Have you really come home? You've been sorely missed, madam, though the master has had some very good parties. Some very good parties indeed.'

'It sounds like it, Mrs Carpenter. Who's here now?'

'Some new friends the master has now. There's Sir Alfred Liliburne. And then there's Lady Stoll and Father Fairlie, you know, the great preacher. And then there's a Mr Vincent Warren, who I don't know that I like so much, though he's very polite.'

'What an odd lot of people, Mrs Carpenter.'

'Yes, madam, they're not the same sort of people at all who used to be here, are they? Still, you know, madam, times change. And how are the young masters, madam?'

'They're very well, thank you, Mrs Carpenter.'

'Oh good, madam, Nanny will be pleased.'

'And the band, Mrs Carpenter. Why is there a band?'

'Oh, I don't know, madam, the master says he likes it. It's always here now, madam, always. Do you know, madam, I think the master's come into a great deal of money.'

'Really. Why do you think that, Mrs Carpenter?'

'Oh, why, oh, madam!' Mrs Carpenter gave a funny little laugh, like one of her budgerigars, Katia thought. 'Oh, madam, you see there's such luxury, such extravagance, such prosperity. I assure madam everything here is really overwhelmingly rich.'

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Katia could not help smiling. Perhaps it was so. She went towards the big drawing-room. Mrs Carpenter looked a little nervous. 'Perhaps,' she said, 'I had better first look in to see that everything is all right.'

'But I do not need to be announced to enter my own drawing-room,' said Katia.

The two women hesitated. And while they did so, there came a great gust of laughter from inside the drawing-room, and four people burst out of the room, laughing so much that Katia could not immediately recognize them. They were in fact Sir Alfred Liliburne, an actress named Jessie Duveen, Lady Stoll and Vincent Warren. Inside, she could see her husband, who, it quickly became clear from the position in which he was standing, had made everyone laugh in this way. The four people who had come out of the room were laughing so much that even the astonishing sight of Katia, who none of them knew, but who they all instinctively recognized, did not interrupt their mirth. Katia went into the drawing-room. At the far end of the room, where she had been used to stand a number of pot-plants, there was a negro band of four men. Jules now ran forward to greet her.

'Katia,' he exclaimed, 'you have come back? Thank God. Thank God that you have come back. I have missed you. Listen, I have painted a great picture. A really great picture. I want you to come upstairs and to look at it. Now, quickly.' And he seized her hand, and almost dragged her upstairs.

'Who are all these people?' asked Katia.

'Oh, that is of no importance. That is really without importance. They are animals. This is Father Fairlie. You have heard of him? That is right, shake hands. He is a great man, and, as he is in the room and listening'—at this Father

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Fairlie gave an indulgent smile, such as men of strength give at children or at geniuses—‘I shall admit that he is not an animal but a man. But the others! Who are they? My darling Katia, I tell you, they are my toys. My gadgets. They are a mere smear on my palette. Come upstairs and I will show you my great painting. You will not like it, perhaps, but it is very remarkable. You will admit that, I think, though you are a harsh judge.’ They were now halfway up the stairs to the studio. ‘I tell you. It is a painting of the head of the Gestapo in London. An impossible subject, you will say. On the contrary. Wait and see. Herr Strichner is a small man, with spectacles. Full of secret desires and furtive cruelties. I know. He has told me of them. I have painted them. Once he was a fishmonger’s apprentice. That too I have conveyed.’

They had reached the studio. Jules flung open the door with a triumphant gesture. ‘There,’ he said, ‘there it is.’

Katia looked. It was true. The painting was a masterpiece of portraiture. It was a painting which triumphed superbly over the character of the subject. Or rather, it was a painting which ennobled the sitter as well as the artist. But this was not what struck Katia first and most strongly. What struck her above all was that it was this man whom she had seen in Judith’s flat in Mount Street.

Katia immediately went downstairs.

12

‘WHERE are you going?’ demanded Jules.

‘Out,’ replied Katia.

‘But you have only just arrived.’

‘I will come back later then. But I must go out now.’

‘But why?’

‘I forgot something,’ said Katia.

‘But, darling, at this time of night. . . .’

‘It doesn’t seem to be very late by the standards of this household,’ said Katia stuffily. Jules laughed rather weakly, in spite of himself. From below the band was still playing, and clearly enjoying itself. Laughter and chatter floated inwards.

‘Listen, darling,’ gabbled Jules. ‘I have missed you very much. Why don’t you come back? Surely it would be far the best thing for all of us. All of us, don’t you see? I mean, all these people down below have nothing to do with us? Nothing at all. They are just playthings to amuse me while you are away.’

‘Including Cynthia Stoll?’ asked Katia as she started to go downstairs.

‘Katia? What are you trying to insinuate? What a ridiculous suggestion. Really, what an absurd idea.’

‘Not so absurd perhaps,’ Katia said.

‘Katia, what can you mean?’

‘It doesn’t matter. I’m sorry I spoke.’ Katia had now reached

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the bottom of the stairs. Vincent Warren was standing there, clearly trying to attract her attention.

'Get me a taxi, will you?' she said to him imperiously.

First he looked surprised. Then he replied, seeking to please her: 'Yes, of course. But,' he added, 'you've only just come.'

'What does it matter?'

'Nothing, nothing at all.' And Warren went to find a taxi in the street.

Jules looked on astonished.

'Do you know who that is? Warren. Katia darling, he's the head of the fascists. He'll probably be the next Prime Minister. You can't talk to him like that.'

'Oh, you painters,' said Katia, 'are all the same. You're all flunkeys at heart. Patronage would make you into anyone's lackey. Well, I see you're doing very well. I'm glad for your sake. Very glad. But this is the last time I enter this house.'

'You've said that before,' said Jules, recalling many previous occasions when Katia had threatened to walk out.

'And this time I mean it,' said Katia, flouncing out.

She slammed the door behind her. He drew a deep breath. Cynthia Stoll came into the hall from the drawing-room. 'What's the matter, darling?' she cooed, placing her hands slightly drunkenly round his neck.

Katia re-entered the room.

'Say goodbye to Nanny and Mrs Carpenter for me, will you,' said she, 'and could you give them this?' She put five pounds on the table. 'Oh no,' she added, as Lady Stoll withdrew her arms from the painter's neck. 'Oh no, please do not disarrange yourself. Do not think of it.' And this time she had really gone.

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Vincent Warren had not found her a taxi.

'I have a car, let me take you where you want to go,' he said, standing outside in the street. She saw him looking at her with greed in his eyes.

'Thank you, I would prefer to walk. I am in a hurry,' she said. 'And,' she said with an air of great finality, 'if you have me followed, I shall never speak to you again.' This extraordinary remark had its effect. Whether or not Warren chose to interpret Katia's statement as being a clear suggestion that she would one day speak to him again, he returned to the house of the painter beaming all over. Katia meantime reached the Hampstead Underground station. Although already nearly midnight, it was still open. She took the train for Regent's Park and made her way to an address she knew to be that of Craig, the leader of the Marylebone Communist Party.

She arrived at a little after a quarter past twelve. She knocked three times.

'Who is it?'

'A friend.' She remembered the codewords for this evening without difficulty, although she had not thought of them for six hours.

'What kind of friend?'

'A friend of justice.'

'What sort of justice?'

'The justice of the High Court.'

'Wait a moment, I shall come down,' said Craig from above. He let her in.

'Very nice to see you,' he said. 'We've got quite a gathering here. Michael has just been brought back from Rotherhithe. You know Michael? No? Well then, he's one of our leading

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militants. He joined the party half an hour ago. And then there's Grace.'

'Who's he?'

'Well, you'll see,' said Craig, as they reached the landing.

'Well, I have some grave news,' said Katia.

'So have we all tonight,' said Craig, 'but you'd like a cup of tea? No? Well, let's go in.'

The room was full of cigarette smoke. Katia could distinguish the figures of Edwards, whom she had once met, and Ann Mullaly, whom (like Mrs Beasley) she disliked. Then there was Michael, lying on a couch, explaining various details of the battle of Rotherhithe. Standing up with his back to the wall was the impassive figure of W. G. Grace, his great beard wild and ferocious.

'Comrades and friends,' Katia said loudly, and a silence followed. Everyone looked at her. 'I want to tell you,' she said, 'who it was that has betrayed the Resistance. I have received certain knowledge.' Her eyes were drawn irresistibly to Baratov, who watched her with attention. 'It was Judith. The Jewess. She is the mistress of Strichner, the Gestapo chief. I know it. I have seen them together.'

13

BUT when the next day agents of the Resistance went to Judith's flat to investigate Katia's allegation they found that she had vanished. It became generally thought therefore that Judith was indeed the traitress of the Resistance. The curious circumstance of the disappearance of Beasley, the ex-chairman of the Marylebone Communist Party who had been attached to W. G. Grace at the start of his mission to Britain, was hardly noticed. People did vanish a great deal in those days.

The repression meantime became more intense.

One morning, Sybil, Sir Stanley Jackson's daughter, observed a large smoke cloud rising from north London.

Sybil ran in to ask her father what it could be.

'That,' said Sir Stanley with bowed head, 'I am afraid, is Golders Green.'

PART III

I

A YEAR passed. A year of bread queues. A year of savage reprisals by the Gestapo. A year of mounting terror all over Britain. Sir Stanley Jackson had gone, rejected—as Hitler would say—‘by history’, but, more important at the moment, by Germany. In his place there reigned, as many had suspected might be the case, his old private secretary, Vincent Warren. All the old men of appeasement had gone now too, Father Fairlie among them. Where were they? In a new hut, specially built for them, in Welwyn camp. Who knew, perhaps they were safer there than in the seats of power? Warren’s Cabinet was a Cabinet of bureaucrats: Sir Albert Rook, for instance, was Foreign Secretary—the first career diplomat to get the top job in the ‘Office’ in the history of the profession. Sir Alfred Liliburne, Lady Stoll’s other old friend, had recovered from his cock-fighting disgrace and was enjoying himself as Home Secretary. Indeed, of the dinner-party which occurred at Lady Stoll’s on the night of Gawthorp’s murder three were members of the government; for Mary Bright-Smith, the female fascist leader, occupied a post named ‘councillor for education’. What of Lady Stoll? She had not been heard of for some time. In fact, she was now down at Stoll in Hertfordshire and was keeping very much quieter. There were some who, knowing Lady Stoll’s instinctive sense for what was at least socially opportune, regarded this move

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to the country as indicating a certain lack of confidence of the Stoll class group in the regime.

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As for the Resistance, the new Central Committee was composed of Michael, his mistress Ann Mullaly, Craig, a doctor from Macclesfield, Maria and Lionel Strachey (whose press was now the only Resistance press in London), and two trade unionists from the Potteries. The three former were now communists. Michael joined the party without further ado the night after the battle of Rotherhithe. Baratov (or Grace) was now the hidden hand behind this body. No decision of any kind was ever taken without Grace being advised of the matter first. His real identity was not known, and many of the newer members of the Resistance were quite content to think of him as a man with a strong Gloucestershire, rather than a Polish, accent. Strange rumours existed about the cause of the disaster at Rotherhithe, but, on the whole, the blame was still attributed to Judith. No effort had been spared to trace her, but all without success. It was assumed that Strichner had hidden her away in some pent-house *de luxe*. In truth she was living by herself in Ireland, and Strichner himself was looking for her as feverishly as was the Resistance.

The battle of Rotherhithe had by now assumed a mythical quality in the Resistance. It was the great event of its past, seeming in retrospect some epic conflict out of the sagas, in which a group of doomed heroes fight with extraordinary gallantry but knowing that eventually they will be overwhelmed, due to the treachery of a woman or a jealous coward. And because of this aspect of the battle, the figure of Michael

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became itself almost legendary. He, it seemed, was the mighty warrior whom even treachery could not kill, who would fight his way out of any situation, who was really half a god, or at least, like Siward, Earl of Northumbria, the grandson of a fairy bear. His movements were treated with the deference that men keep for heroes. Conscious that the subtle propaganda of the communists even in the Resistance was building him up to a position beyond his real talents, Michael kept a modesty about himself which enhanced his reputation while somewhat angering those closest around him.

It was inevitable that in this position he should be worshipped by women. He now lived with Ann Mullaly openly in the Albany. And for Ann Mullaly the women of the Resistance had that special dislike that they reserve for the women of the great. She was especially hated by Katia, who now had become secretary of the Resistance Central Committee.

Katia, like the Stracheys, the trade unionists and the doctor from Macclesfield, was not a communist. But that party was now by far the most powerful in the country. The socialists and the conservatives had both more or less vanished. The 'independents' were larger in number than the communists, but they had no real policy of their own—except to win the war. In many ways they were too gentlemanly to be able to compete with the communists over questions of conspiracy and assassination. From now onwards, however, the party themselves began to attempt to be gentlemanly also—not in relation to the Germans but towards their allies in the Resistance. Publicly, in fact, they declared that their only policy was, like that of the independents, simply that of winning the war. In some ways, indeed, they were less revolutionary even than

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the independents. For example, while several of the independents had become republicans (due to the absence of the monarchy in Canada), the communists strongly championed the Monarchy.

Now until this time the Government-in-Exile had had only informal contacts with the Resistance. Indeed, for a long time they had thought almost as Sir Stanley Jackson and Mr Gawthorpe had done—that the Resistance was a gang of bolshevists and cut-throats. The Prime Minister, in his 'Montreal declaration', had openly condemned attacks by members of the English public upon German soldiers or *collaborateurs*, accurately prophesying that such assaults would inevitably bring the innocent public as a whole into trouble. This announcement had gone unheeded. The remarkable patience of the German occupying authority prevented this from bringing disaster for a while. Later, when Hassel had given way to Strichner, and terror was practised at every opportunity by the Germans, the Resistance had grown too big to suppress by a mere edict issued in Montreal. Nevertheless, the Government-in-Exile held its hand. It was difficult from that distance to gain accurate impressions of the work of the Resistance. Agents entering England through Ireland had passed back to Montreal strangely conflicting opinions. Some had openly castigated the Resistance as being of no importance whatever. Suddenly, however, when the war had started at long last to go well for the Allies, and the combined chiefs of staff were planning at Washington to make a landing upon British soil, the Resistance had turned out to be of unusual importance in *émigré* English politics. In all the houses in Montreal's Côte de Neige, the most fashionable residential street in the town which the British had taken as their headquarters, the

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unknown men of the streets and woods of England came to be regarded with extraordinary affection. Wild stories were heard of the legendary 'Michael', of the resolute men of the Twilight Press, of the massacre at the Cockpit Royal, Westminster, of the terrible night of long knives at Rotherhithe, of the amazing gallantry of the North Londoners. Padding about in the snowy, well-fed streets of Montreal, *émigré* politicians would wonder what contact they could invent for themselves, or their party, with any of the Resistance groups. In the fashion shops, Resistance berets, Resistance jackets and Resistance boots enjoyed a brief vogue.

The question of the relations between the Government-in-Exile and the Resistance became acute as the Resistance movement gradually turned itself into a genuine guerrilla war force. All over the country bands of men had been organized to fight the Germans in the hills and in the streets, on flat land and in woods. These forces harried the Germans at every opportunity, driving the infuriated German commanders to take ever more violent measures against the stricken population.

As spring approached, the Government-in-Exile determined to send a minister, with full powers, to establish formal relations with the Central Council of the Resistance. The man chosen for this hazardous journey was Lord Carr. He was a fearless, brilliant servant of the state, an ex-ambassador in Washington and then in Berlin. When a young man at the Paris Embassy he had been elected a member of the Jockey the same night that a play of his was produced at the Comédie Française. An air of the fabulous had attended all his exploits. Now he was about to embark upon his most difficult task. In some ways, he seemed to be a man supremely well fitted for

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this assignment. Of his courage there could be no doubt. Of his loyalty and fidelity to the government which had sent him there could be no doubt either. Yet one question mark attended him and his reputation as he made his tortuous journey first to Switzerland, then to Ireland and finally to Cornwall: did he possess sufficient tact to deal with the new unknown men who were the leaders of the Resistance in Britain? More, did he possess any tact at all?

The first meeting between Carr and the delegates of the Resistance was planned for March 15th in a farm on Bodmin Moor, on the edge of Dozmary Pool, the celebrated spot whence King Arthur was rowed away to Avalon, and where the sword Excalibur had been thrown into the waves by the doubting Sir Bedivere.

2

A SPECIAL meeting of the Central Committee of the Resistance was held in the Stracheys' house to consider who should go to meet Lord Carr on the Resistance's behalf.

'I propose comrade Michael,' Baratov said. He had been asked to attend the meeting because of his 'wide experience' of international affairs. Nowadays, nobody bothered if the Central Committee called each other by the name of 'comrade' or not. 'Comrade Michael stands out by reason of his invaluable contributions to the movement, his experience of dealing with members of the upper class, and his absolute trustworthiness.' Nobody ventured to criticize this judgement, and Michael was duly named a member of the delegation to meet Lord Carr.

'I nominate comrade Lionel Strachey as the other member of the delegation,' said the doctor from Macclesfield, 'the independent group on the Central Committee regard comrade Strachey as being best fitted to put their point of view to the representatives of the government-in-exile.'

This also was agreed without quarrel. But there was one point upon which the committee showed itself divided.

'I propose that we are accompanied by a secretary,' said Lionel Strachey. 'Our aim must be to present as proper a front as possible to the representatives of the government.'

'The obvious thing would be to send the secretary of the

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Central Committee,' said the Macclesfield doctor. 'This, of course, was Katia.

There was a pause. Everyone in the room except the doctor knew that Katia was in love with Michael. No one knew how close Ann Mullaly's hold was over Michael. Everyone felt that a certain force was pushing these two remarkable individuals together. Baratov was silent. He had had his eye on Katia from the first moment that he saw her. She had, however, repelled his approach.

'What does Katia say?' asked Maria Strachey.

'I should be glad to go,' she said simply.

So it was decided. In truth, everyone left behind in London was almost as interested in knowing whether Michael and Katia would come together during the journey as what Lord Carr would say. Ann Mullaly, however, busied herself with harsh reflections that the delegation to meet Carr was entirely *bourgeois* in composition. How disgraceful that the upper class should hang on to power so easily!

3

MICHAEL, Strachey and Katia travelled down to Cornwall in the back of a large lorry, nominally carrying tractor spare parts. The plan was that they would travel down in two stages. On the first night they would stop in a country house belonging to one of the leading Wiltshire members of the Resistance. The lorry driver dropped them on the edge of the estate, where he would pick them up again the next day. The three of them then walked through the woods to the house.

All this time Katia and Michael had remained at a formal distance. That evening, however, the tension between them became too great. It happened in this way. They dined well, though rather late. Their host, a member of an old Wiltshire family never ennobled, had brought out his best wines in their honour. He and Lionel Strachey were much of an age. Imperceptibly, by the turn of the conversation, Michael and Katia were forced into the position of being at least allies, of acting in connivance with each other. After dinner, the pattern was repeated. Michael found himself talking to Katia exclusively. Their conversation touched upon their own pasts, their friends before the war, their views on art rather than upon matters closely connected with the Resistance.

‘And your children?’ asked Michael.

‘What do you mean, and them?’ she answered tremulously.

‘Well, how do they all fit into all this?’

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'Into all what?'

'Into this scheme of life? This journey to the west? Where are they?'

'They are being looked after by Maria Strachey,' answered Katia.

'You were able to leave them in the middle of the war?'

'This was more important to me,' she answered, looking at him fearlessly from her deep-blue eyes, 'besides, they are really old enough to look after themselves.'

Michael looked hard at her. 'Katia,' he said.

'Yes?'

'No,' he said, 'it was nothing.'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes, at least I think so.' She sighed. He was thinking to himself: If only I were free. She is free. But I have Ann. And Ann has done everything for me. It is she, and the propaganda of her party, which have made me what I am. If it were not for Ann, he thought, Katia would not feel as she does. I would not be a national figure. A hero. I would just be one more worker in the movement. Then he thought to himself, Even so, this is war. He looked at Katia, at her marvellous eyes, deep blue like a dream of the Mediterranean. He observed her face with its high, magnificent cheekbones. He noted the exuberance and love of life in even her smallest movements. And he thought to himself: Yes, I am lost, I am hers. Katia is the only woman I know who measures up to the tragedy of our times. Aloud, he said, 'We might continue this discussion later.'

There was a pause. Her eyes never left his. He was conscious of a great throbbing in his heart. What would she say? She nodded, and looked away.

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An hour later, Michael left his room resolutely. He waited for a moment on the landing. The house was old, and the boards creaked as he trod towards Katia's room. A clock struck downstairs in the hall. The rest of the house was asleep. It was almost like the old days, Michael thought, almost as if he were staying a week-end somewhere in the lazy days before the war. He tip-toed to Katia's door. He turned the handle, holding his breath. She was inside, waiting for him, with only the bedside lamp alight.

'Darling,' she said, 'I thought you were never coming.'

He was too moved by love and passion to answer.

She flung her arms round him. 'I knew that one day we would be together,' she said.

'I thought so too,' Michael said, in a humdrum way, after thought.

'You thought so? But you made no sign?'

'No. I could not.'

Katia frowned. 'Do you love her? You know who I mean.'

'Not now,' said Michael gravely. He held her to him. He kissed her softly, and she answered with greater passion. And then they drew closer to each other. 'Darling Katia, darling Katia!' Michael kept whispering to her, and she kept replying, 'Oh, my darling, oh, my darling!' For each of them, the heights of passion seemed suddenly and for the first time almost sacred, revealing an intensity of life which each separately felt to be almost mystical in its effect.

4

LATE the following day, Katia, Michael and Lionel Strachey arrived at Dozmary Pool. Lionel Strachey could not help guessing what had happened the night before to his two companions. Katia had about her the strange, completed air which women have when their love is fulfilled. Michael wore the expression of lean abstraction which men have in such circumstances. They drove in silence most of the way, leaving Lionel Strachey free to correct the proofs of a book of poems written by young Resistance fighters.

At the farm by Dozmary Pool they were welcomed by an old woman who closely resembled a witch. She showed them to the farm parlour, and shut the door after them. Before them they found the glittering figure of Lord Carr and one secretary. Lord Carr had his back to a blazing fire, and his secretary sat at a table with a file of papers open before him. Both exuded an air of well-being in marked contrast with the cold representatives of England emerging from the mist on the moor. Lord Carr was dressed as for a day at the Foreign Office, in sponge-bag trousers and black coat and waistcoat. A watch-chain slid handsomely across his figure kept still youthful by riding and squash. He did not seem aware of any tension, possible hostility between himself and those who now entered the room. He simply came forward like a country gentleman, greeting the man who is about to marry his daughter, with a

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wide generosity, a human sympathy in his smile. 'Now then,' he seemed to be saying, 'what's all this nonsense? Sit down, won't you, and have a talk. I forget if you smoke.'

What he actually said was:

'You look cold. Come and warm yourself by the fire. I'll get some rum and brandy. Mixed, it makes the best drink possible for people who are cold and wet. Bob,' he said, turning to the secretary, 'get the glasses, there's a good fellow.'

The representatives of the Resistance sat down in the chairs which, with a wave of the hand, were indicated by his lordship. Even Michael seemed a little abashed by the grandeur of this greeting. Subconsciously returning to his own past, he asked Lord Carr, 'I hope you had a good trip over here?'

'Oh,' said Lord Carr, considering the question very carefully, 'middling, I should say. There was a great deal of hole-in-the-corner stuff—secrecy—cloak-and-dagger nonsense—which I personally find repugnant. But then I have always,' he added, smiling, sipping his rum and brandy, 'always hated detective stories.'

'Even Simenon?' asked Lord Carr's secretary, a young man with marked Foreign Office airs.

'Oh well,' said Lord Carr, 'perhaps I might make an exception with regard to Simenon. He has had an extraordinary vogue, you know,' he went on, turning to Michael and Strachey, 'a quite remarkable vogue in Canada during the war. Really, I cannot think of a writer who is so popular in Montreal at the moment. But still there again,' he gave again one of his specially brilliant smiles, 'what after all is popularity? How often does one not see men dazzled by sudden success into supposing they are happy? They find themselves

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talking a great deal, they glance down at what they thought they had in their hands. And what do they find? The gems have lost their lustre! The gems have lost their lustre, gentlemen!

At this point Michael tried immediately to bring up the question of why he, Strachey and Katia had travelled down to Cornwall, and at such risk. But Lord Carr stopped him. 'No, no,' he said, with obvious amusement, 'you are going to say that I have been successful in my life, and that the gems have not, in my case, lost their lustre?'

The assumption was so preposterous, and put forward so innocently and with such charm, that Michael and Strachey felt themselves bound to smile, almost to surrender.

'You may be right,' sighed Lord Carr, pretending to be lightly, wryly amused, 'but think, after all, of our respective positions. Here am I,' he said, with the same irony, 'here am I, a mere envoy. And here are you, the chosen delegates of the great Resistance. Or'—and once again he paused, thinking deeply—'or should I say that you are the "representatives" of the Resistance?' He laughed, a curious high-pitched cackle of a laugh which might almost have echoed from out of the last century.

Now at last Lionel Strachey suddenly said, drinking down the last of his rum and brandy, 'Well then, perhaps we should move on to business?'

'Perhaps, perhaps,' said Lord Carr, with the same irony. 'Are we ready then for our discussion?'

'When you are,' returned Michael, naturally the leader of the group.

'Well then. Bob! To business!' He spoke of 'business' with faint amusement, as if it would never have occurred to him to use the word to describe his own activities.

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The secretary put in front of Lord Carr a file of papers tied together by red tape. Lionel Strachey noted that the papers in question were those of the Foreign Office in exile. They had the same formal elegance of the documents which he had examined while preparing his history of British diplomacy in the nineteenth century. Lord Carr did not, however, look at any of these papers, or any others, while he spoke.

'First of all,' Lord Carr said, 'let me tell you with what satisfaction that I find myself once more on English soil. My only regret is that I come by myself—with fewer men even than'—he paused—'than Bonnie Prince Charlie arrived with at Moidart. But I know perfectly well that, as in his case, my solitariness is only temporary. After all, are not my clans already gathering?' He smiled at his audience.

'I hope for all our sakes that the parallel will not be taken any further,' said Michael.

Lord Carr smiled again and went on without alluding to the interruption. 'Indeed, I am instructed to tell you that before long—how long precisely I cannot say—an army will be coming to these shores. A great army. The greatest army in modern war. I am no soldier, but I am certainly impressed by what I have seen of the preparations for this army.'

'You will permit us to answer you at the end of your remarks?' asked Michael.

'To answer me? To answer me? Of course. Though I was unaware that I had asked any questions.' For the first time Lord Carr frowned. But then he went on. 'The fact is that the government is very aware of what you and the Resistance have done to maintain morale here in Britain. We are all aware, for'—he turned to his secretary, who nodded gravely—'it is an astounding piece of work that you have

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done. Do not think that we are unaware of your very considerable achievements. When this page of history comes to be written, it will not be your part which will be ignored. The time has now come, however, when it is possible to deliver at the enemies of freedom a supreme blow. Mighty armies and armadas have been assembled. Vast supplies have been concentrated. The future may at last be considered bright.

'I need not tell you that it would not be possible for this force to make an immediate assault upon the present occupiers of our homeland on the homeland itself. This would be a logistic impossibility. The blow will come of course from the south. How precisely? I am myself in the dark in this matter. But it is my duty to inform you that the relief of this island will only occur when France has already been liberated.

'In the meantime it is His Majesty's Government's desire to regularize at an early date their relations with the gallant Resistance fighters and partisans. They are proposing, therefore, that I should assume the post of President of the Council of the Resistance. I shall be allotted cabinet rank, and shall have full powers.

'Detailed plans for the final stages of the work of the Resistance will shortly arrive. In the meantime I am allowed to tell you their general outlines. These are that, from as soon as possible, from today in effect, the Resistance groups will concentrate on economic and military sabotage, but will not undertake large-scale military actions. These are considered wasteful of life and liable to incur, as in other occupied countries, the needless sacrifice of hostages. It is His Majesty's Government's intention, therefore, that the bands of partisans already assembled will be disbanded as soon as possible.

'My final instructions consist of the setting-up of a

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secretariat and a headquarters. His Majesty's Government are seriously considering whether or not the headquarters of the Resistance should not henceforth be in the West Country.'

Lord Carr made this speech without once referring to a note, and without, at the same time, looking more than occasionally at his interlocutors. When he had finished, he smiled and got up. 'You, no doubt, have your own views,' he added. 'And I, for one, should be most interested to hear them.'

'I think,' said Strachey, 'all that can be done is for us to report your proposals to our council and to discuss them in that body. We shall be letting you know the results of that discussion, and whether there are any counter-proposals.'

Of course, in these remarks Lionel Strachey was claiming for the Resistance Council the right to negotiate with the *émigré* government as if it were a sovereign body. Lord Carr understood the situation in an instant. With remarkable reticence he refrained from comment. Instead, he merely replied: 'Very well then. Let us meet in a fortnight's time at any place of your suggestion.' It was this unexpected reserve on the part of Lord Carr at the first meeting with the Resistance which subsequently secured for him the final victory which he was seeking. For, at the resumed meeting in a fortnight's time, the Resistance Council accepted all his points, with Strachey the special champion of this policy.

This reversal of the situation was caused by a series of events remarkably turbulent reckoned even by the side of the turbulent events of the history of the Resistance.

ON THEIR way back to London from the meeting at Dozmary Pool, Michael, Katia and Strachey stopped one night with the head of the Resistance in Dorset. This was a dashing colonel, pre-war master of foxhounds, a very different sort of patriot from those customarily gathered round the executive board in Bloomsbury Square. For him war signified hunting carried on by other means. Indeed, he welcomed the three Resistance leaders at his house rather as if he was welcoming a group of people back from a long day with the Blackmore Vale.

'Come in, come in, make yourself at home,' he said, 'take your things off. Have a hot bath. Have a glass of wine.'

Over dinner he said to Michael, 'I wonder if you'd like a spot of sport in the morning?'

'Of course,' said Michael.

'We've had news that the Gestapo boss, Strichner, or Strichnine, or whatever he's called, is going to leave Exeter tomorrow at a certain time. We've got a group of volunteers organized to blow him up when he passes a particular bridge. Would you care to go out with them? You'd take command, of course. It'd be child's play for you and it might be an interesting action. What do you say?'

'Michael,' Katia said, 'you should not do this. You are

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wanted in London. You have work there. You can't go out on a duck-shoot like this.'

Their host raised his eyes. Was this the hero of so many actions about whom he had heard so much?

'What do you say, Lionel?' demanded Katia, her eyes flashing with anxiety.

'I agree absolutely with you,' said Strachey. 'It would be impossible.'

Michael watched his host. He did not seem contemptuous exactly, but hurt, surprised, unhappy.

'Of course I shall come,' he said.

'Splendid, splendid,' said the colonel, immensely relieved. 'I'll call you at seven. The work should be over by eleven. And you will be in London by evening easily.'

When they were alone together upstairs Katia threw her arms round Michael's neck. 'For God's sake don't go out tomorrow,' she said, 'for my sake.'

'Why especially tomorrow?'

'Because I feel that there will be something terrible happening tomorrow. Please do not go.'

'If we are to be together, this sort of thing will crop up nearly every day,' said Michael seriously. He was tired, a little irritated both by the colonel and by Katia's intervention in these affairs.

'But tomorrow, don't let it happen tomorrow. Let this be our honeymoon. Let this be the time we can look back to and be able to say, "Well, then at least we were happy." And we shall be able to think that it is this, this honeymoon of happiness, for which we are really fighting. We are fighting, aren't we, to be free, to be able to do what we want when we want and not be ordered about. Surely this is why we are

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doing what we are doing? Oh, I know that that girl has made you a member of the Communist Party, and that you believe that you have a duty to make things better for everyone in the world. But doesn't "better" mean more happiness, more freedom, of this kind? More golden moments to look back to?'

'Yes, but I must go tomorrow.'

'Wouldn't it be better to leave our host thinking that you are a coward rather than sacrifice yourself simply to the fear of being thought afraid? That is what you are really afraid of, isn't it? Of *him* thinking that you are afraid. Isn't that all it is?'

'Maybe, but I must go tomorrow.'

'Do I mean nothing to you? Oh, I know that we have known each other for only a very short while, a few hours, but these have meant so much, and I don't want to lose it all, to be left only with memories. This is a woman speaking to you, Michael, a woman who wants to want to make you happy, a woman who loves you with all the depth of her being, and who would do anything for you. It is I, Katia, speaking. We are made for each other, you and I, and together we could be happier than anyone has ever been.'

Michael looked at her. 'It is true,' he said, 'all that you have said is true. But I must go out tomorrow.'

6

IT WAS a marvellous frosty morning. Michael and his group of 'partisans' were sitting high up in the Dorset hills. There were about fifteen of them, about half being communists. They were all tough, seasoned men. Their technique was an old one—that of the explosion of a bridge at the precise moment that the German convoy crossed over it. Charges had been placed under the bridge which would be set off at the given moment by a lever. Certain of Michael's followers were armed with grenades and machine guns in order to add to the confusion, and were placed on the top of an incline commanding the gully through which the road ran. Agents in Exeter had reported that Strichner would be travelling in the third car of the convoy, a *Darraler*.

In the clear air, the small band of assassins waited expectantly. It was as if they were a group of priests waiting for the start of the service in the robing room of some great cathedral. A sacramental air hung over the occasion, and each of the men spoke when they needed to do so with hushed voices. Although their main task at this moment was simply to wait, they all found something extra to do, some specially interesting strap to tighten, some extra gadget to put in readiness. From the portable radio Michael's radio operator heard the news that Strichner's convoy had reached Yeovil. The news was passed around the group of men, and a hush

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fell over them. The notion of sacrament occurred to all. Several men prayed—though not for themselves, but that they might be successful in killing their prey. What strange god of battles would answer their call they did not know.

‘All well?’ asked Michael.

‘All well,’ came the reassuring answer from everyone.

‘Action stations, comrades,’ he ordered. The service had begun.

The group crawled and wriggled to their posts. Everyone was silent. The blue sky breathed a peace which was sharp, invigorating, comforting. And then, in the distance, unmistakably there came the noise of motor-car engines. Everyone stiffened.

‘Steady.’ Michael passed the word along the line of his followers. ‘Steady now.’

They were steady enough. The man responsible for blowing the charge stood with his hand on the lever, sweat crowding down his brow. The engines drew nearer. Everyone was ready for the sacrifice. For that, they realized, was what it was. It was a pagan ceremony, pure and simple. Nothing Christian about what they were doing. They were appealing to the gods at the bottom of the garden, the corn deities who understood death more than Jehovah who thought it a mere episode. But Pan—he knew what it was. Death was a great thing for Pan.

The engines came into view. They were not the convoy after all. They were three lorries, travelling slowly from Exeter to Shaftesbury, with a cargo of wood stretching out far behind each other. Michael’s men relaxed. The man with his hand on the lever replaced the safety-catch which had been placed over it for security’s sake. But then it was observed

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that the first car of Strichner's convoy was following immediately upon the last of the lorries. All the better, thought Michael, it will slow the convoy down. It will give us a better chance to get everybody before they run off. The others around Michael were less optimistic than he was—feeling that an added complication, such as the lorries, would undoubtedly make things difficult for them, in some unknown way.

In the convoy, in the second and not the third car, Strichner was leaning back on the back seat, alone. He was dressed in his simple grey uniform, with the iron cross beneath the chin like a bib. He was reading a typed report on the condition of his Eastern front. He was generally perturbed at the way the war was going. He was afraid, in fact, even at this stage, of defeat. He glanced out of the window, still thinking of Russia, Stalingrad, his brother (a colonel in the Smolensk region), and of the Fuehrer. He thought also, with a twinge of irritation, of Judith whom he had not seen since the night of long knives. They were just about to cross a bridge, he noticed—a small bridge over a typical English meandering stream. His driver slowed down as they reached the bridge, changed gear, and passed over it. Strichner had time to reflect, entirely fortuitously—as one often wakes up the second before one has timed an alarm clock to ring—that this bridge ought to have been examined before it was crossed, ought perhaps to be permanently guarded, when he was made violently aware of a deafening explosion immediately behind him. He caught a last shaft of the dazzling sunshine, while his own car was lifted gently into the air and fell heavily on to the ground. All the windows were blown in. Immediately also Michael's light machine-gunners opened fire. The whole area of the bridge seemed to turn to fire. The men in the third car

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were all dead, those in the fourth and fifth hurt. Strichner found himself badly bruised on the roadside, and, also, totally blind.

Immediately he got up and tried madly to walk away into safety. Behind him he could hear the grenades exploding and the machine guns spurting—and some of the latter of these were, as he knew, those of his own men. But his aim was to get out of the battle, to lie down somewhere safely at peace. The undergrowth seemed restful, comforting, despite its difficulty. He stumbled on through it, so that no one would realize he was blind—as he had hardly realized himself yet. At last he tripped, and lay where he fell, winded, weary, but strangely at rest. From where he lay he could still hear the sound of battle, though it was, nevertheless, confused, a murmur rather than a blare, a noise heard through the trees.

The battle, Michael thought, had gone well at the start. There had been no doubt about the third car—it had gone, blown up to Hades, and all its occupants. Only at the sacramental moment of the explosion did it occur to Michael to wonder, briefly, whether it had been Strichner inside the car. Could a mistake have been made at Yeovil? But all such doubts immediately vanished when the battle began. This, of course, was a small engagement. Nevertheless, it is on such small-scale occasions that a commander senses that he is directing events, that he is in real command of his men. It is a plannable occurrence, not one of the vast amorphous battles of modern war. Above all, perhaps, there is only one commander, only one officer—Michael himself in this case. Yet somewhat to his surprise the battle was not immediately won. He had all the advantages of terrain and surprise. But the Germans beneath were blazing away with great effect, although

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many of them were presumably wounded. To Michael's astonishment, indeed, he became slowly aware that the Partisans were likely even to suffer a defeat. For, while his men's firing seemed to be going astray, that of the Germans was clearly going home. Four, five, six of his group were wounded, and one had been shot dead. Instinctively, Michael passed the order around to abandon the position, and to withdraw northwards into the Somerset hills. There, there were semi-mountain fastnesses where they could live without discovery for weeks—concealed cellars beneath cottages, or simply in woods. Michael and his chief lieutenant held the position for as long as they could, until it was clear that all the rest, including the wounded, were away. The Germans, meantime, in the road below were preparing to advance upwards. Michael himself kept blaring away, and for one second he recalled that far-off day in Pall Mall when he had engaged to shoot Sir Stanley Jackson. Many things had altered since then, he thought. Now, once again, after his many roles, more political than military, he was again a man with a gun in his hand, being attacked, and attacking. With a final blast he shot a German who had incautiously crawled out from behind the hedge by the road. Then he left his position. He made for the woods, like everyone else who had preceded him. He was in a fine state of fitness, and made his escape from the woods near the road very easily. There was still in him a certain zest and passion for excitement found in all the best guerrilla leaders, and now that this stage of the Resistance had been reached, and guerrilla warfare was spreading all over Britain, he was in his element.

He looked back for a moment. Later he told himself, superstitiously, If I had not looked back, I would not have been

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hit. But he was hit, by accident as it seemed to him, in the leg. He felt his whole leg go heavy and there was a tremendous burning and a sudden dizziness which shook its way through his body like a shiver. He sat down quite suddenly, and his first thought was not of the wound, but of the fact that he was alone. He hadn't noticed that he was alone previously, he had seemed so well accompanied by his thoughts and his aspirations, but now he was certainly alone, and not only alone but lonely. There was no sound now in the clear morning, just a scent of pine needles, and the sharpness of the air. But whereas all of nature had seemed, a minute before, to have been pulsating with him, beating in the same time as himself, now it was as if it had suddenly lost interest. He felt himself without pain, a corpse, a dead thing—not even a dead man. Then he thought, But what is the difference between a dead man and a dead thing? Only then did he think of Katia. He thought to himself: Yes, Katia was right. I should not have come out this morning. But then after all he would not have missed this clear sharp battle in the bright air for anything. No, not even for Katia. All the same, he was glad that he had told Katia, when he left their host's house, that she was the only person he would think of if he were hit. It was true, he thought, Katia was the only one he cared for.

Michael tried to get to his feet, but was hardly able to do so. He wondered idly where his enemies were. He realized that in this condition he would be unable to get to any of the Resistance hiding holes in the next county, and thought, I must find my way to a farm of some kind. This phrase 'a farm of some kind' stuck in his brain, and he kept on repeating it with a kind of mad conviction that it would help him to get to such a place. He was about to start walking off again as best he could

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when the answer to his unexpressed prayer seemed to arrive. It was a cart, driven by an old farmer, which was winding its way along a rough track some thirty yards off. Michael resisted the temptation to call out, and dragged himself into a position where he would inevitably be seen. The old man, who was sitting with his legs sideways dangling off the edge of the cart, saw him, but hastily looked away. The horse, however, had also seen Michael, and seemed almost to want to stop for him. Michael went on staggering towards the track, and when he was near enough said in a loud voice: 'Can you help me? I'm afraid I've hurt myself. I'd like to get myself dressed.' As he spoke, Michael became aware of another man lying on the back of the cart, his shirt open, his head knocking against the floor of the cart, his eyes wide open and staring at the heavens. The old man followed Michael's gaze and said in the Dorset idiom:

'There's somebut else who's hurt 'i'self. I'll be an ambulance next. However, 't takes all sorts t'make a wurrlid. So t'say.' The old man thereupon got down from his cart and helped Michael, who was now almost half faint, on to the back of the cart next to the man lying there. Before he entirely passed out, Michael observed to his surprise—surprise far more than horror—that his companion was German.

He was not only German but Strichner himself. But Strichner was past caring also as to the nationality of his co-traveller. His eyes were fixed upon a sky all of his own, of terrible emptiness, yet full of small dots which he could not quite pick out one from the other, but which strangely gave the impression of a painter's representation of the inside of the atom. There were waves and there were shadows—great

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shadows which grew or diminished according to whether they were passing under trees or in sunlight.

So the wagon-load drove on through the hills around Yeovil till the farmer reached his home at Staple Leaning, a small village with fewer houses than there are letters in its name. The farmer lived on the outside of the village. He was a fine figure of a man, being about fifty years of age. He had not spoken to his wife for nearly twenty years. They had two sons and a daughter, and the first of these was now in Canada. The second was a joiner in Bristol. The daughter helped her mother with the milk round. The farmer had a girl friend in Yeovil, with whom he would go to the pictures on Wednesday afternoons. He was a cunning, rich peasant, and he had picked up Strichner, and then Michael, because he wanted to make something out of them. He believed in some way that some advantage could be gained from the blind German and the wounded Englishman, but he could not quite see what. He imagined that some dubious deity would inform him about this at a later stage.

When he reached his farm he made certain that no one was about and then drove his cart into a yard. He dragged Michael into a barn and laid him on some straw. He pulled Strichner along behind him, and placed him near Michael on another part of the straw stack. Then he went into the house, and quietly brewed himself some tea.

About two hours later, when he had still reached no decision about what to do with the two prisoners, he went out again into the yard to take another look at them. As he approached the barn door, he heard unmistakably the sounds of conversation from within. He was a man absolutely without political views, political feelings or political instincts. To him

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the Government, the local Council, the powers that be of all descriptions were strange organizations without justification, gods perhaps, but anyway hostile to him. He was in reality an anarchist who failed to see the reason for any form of organization. Government of any kind in fact was the beginning of socialism. He therefore was disgusted by what he heard from the other side of the barn door.

'I envy England its defeat,' Strichner was saying. 'It is true—as Nietzsche said—a great victory is a great danger. Worse than a defeat. A defeat purges and ennobles. If you live through this defeat you will emerge stronger than you have ever been.'

'But on the other hand,' Michael added, 'Germany will profit too. Even if you lose the war altogether, as you may do because of the Soviet Union, you will be able to boast: once we beat Britain in fair fight.' In his weak state, all the superficial vocabulary of his communist experience dropped off him, and he spoke as he would have spoken had he never had an ideological education of any kind.

'Germany will suffer, too,' said the blind man, 'but in suffering she will cause the world to suffer. You blame Germany for starting this war. Of course, in a limited sense, that is true. I helped to plan it myself. But for centuries the other powers have exerted themselves to keep us in an inferior position. In the psychological history of our race Richelieu, Edward VII and the mediaeval popes are contemporaries. You have all realized that once we were able to raise ourselves we would be the greatest nation in the world. When did you realize this first? Many centuries ago, it seems to you. To us, who understand history, it was only the other day.'

'The future of the world will be dominated by the final

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struggle between the socialist and the capitalist conceptions of the world, not by racial quarrels,' explained Michael. 'In this Germany may be on one side or the other. How can anyone believe that anything so arbitrary as race will be of any significance in the future?'

This civilized conversation was now interrupted by the appearance of the farmer.

'You bloody Hun,' he said to Strichner. 'I'll settle ye.' With this, he immediately fell on Strichner with a pickaxe. To Michael's amazement he had killed him within half a minute. The blind man made no movement, until the last, when he uttered a terrible sigh, heaved himself up on to his knees, and, trying to make the Nazi salute, shouted with all his force, 'Heil Hitler.' He fell back and died, moaning. This terrible display of violence on the part of the farmer caused Michael astonishment, even though he had become greatly used to violence. The farmer looked at him and winked. 'Nought else t'do with a Hun than kill 'im,' said the farmer gravely. The farmer himself had no explanation for his sudden outburst of anger. He had no feelings of remorse. His action had been the simple reaction of a man up against the unexpected. Now, he thought to himself, what shall I do to the other one?

Michael, too, was wondering about this question.

'Why did you do that?' he asked. His wound had dried. It was undoubtedly inflamed, and he knew that he would die unless he had it dressed soon. But he felt an extraordinary reluctance to make any appeal to the old farmer to do so. He felt that the old man had killed his late companion out of madness and that there was therefore no reason why he should not kill Michael himself in the same way. The same thoughts were running through the mind of the old man. The two of them

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looked at each other in the eyes for a moment or two. The hideously disfigured and bloody body of Strichner lay between them. Each sensed what the other was thinking of.

The elemental moment was interrupted by the noise of sirens.

'That is the Germans coming to look for me. And for him,' added Michael, pointing at Strichner.

The old man acted quickly. He threw a pile of straw over Strichner's body with the pickaxe.

'Lie down, and I'll cover you up,' he said to Michael.

This was his prisoner, his affair. Michael consented, and in a moment he was hidden. The old man went out of the barn. Two motor-cycles were parked against the door of the farm. He went in through the back door. From the kitchen he heard the noise of voices in the front. His wife was being interrogated by two Germans. Had she seen any members of the Resistance? The farmer heard her deny having done so. He went into the front part of the house. Brushing his wife angrily aside, he demanded what was wanted of him. The Germans, very young men, repeated their request. He considered the question. Michael was his prisoner.

'No,' he said. 'I have seen no one.'

Immediately he had said it, he was conscious that for the first time in his life he had implicated himself in politics, all those things represented by the conversations overheard from the other side of the barn door. He had committed a crime against his own way of life, and he regretted it.

The two Germans bowed politely and asked, with equal politeness, if they might make a search.

'Of course,' said the old man stuffily, as if he felt that his honour had been impugned by the request.

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He watched the two men disappear into the inner rooms of the house. He sat down in a chair by the window from which he could watch the door of the barn. His nervousness betrayed itself to his wife who said in a whisper, 'You've not hidden nobbut, Jan, you've not hidden nobbut, surely?'

When, in accordance with his vow of twenty years never to speak with her, he said nothing, she immediately mistook his silence for an admission of guilt, for a statement that he had in fact hidden someone, that he had done what he had said he would never do: take a part in the war. She reacted in fact as if a silence on his part was simply a normal part of normal life, as if he had intended to communicate to her a modest consciousness of heroism. Furious, he looked at her in a mood of intense anger. He foresaw that, after the Germans had left, she would be running out to the barn, and dressing Michael's wound, and feeding him and concealing him, making him hers and not his any more. So he went into the yard himself, and found the Germans.

'There.' He pointed to the barn. 'There. My missus has told me that there's an Englishman there, and a body of a German killed by the Englishman, and he's wounded. She wouldn't tell you, because she never does things without my knowing. Go in and get the Englishman.'

The Germans looked a long time at the old farmer, and then they went towards the barn. From inside the house the old farmer's wife watching from the parlour window gave a scream, but the Germans either did not hear it but took no notice of it. They simply went on walking towards the barn. The old farmer, in the centre of the yard, did nothing either, but just watched. The Germans went into the barn, their machine guns ready in their hands. They opened the door

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of the barn, and peered inside, and then went in. And then for a long time there was a silence, a silence unbroken by any noise of firing or even disturbed by movement. The old farmer watched from the middle of the yard, and his wife watched from the parlour window, but they saw nothing—nothing at all. At last, after twenty minutes' silence, the old man walked slowly towards the barn door. He opened it as cautiously as the Germans had done, and peered inside, just as they had done. He walked into the barn. Inside he saw the body of Strichner, and the bodies of the two Germans, both killed apparently as he had killed Strichner. Then he saw the body of Michael, lying peacefully in the straw. He wasn't sure what had happened to Michael, and he thought that he might be still alive. So he walked gingerly, and looked at his face. And the face was enough to tell him that he too was dead, dead of his wound no doubt. The old man shrugged his shoulders, and went out of the barn. His wife was in the yard now, walking slowly and timidly towards him.

'Get some paraffin, girl,' he said almost with affection. These were his first words to her for twenty years, and the very fact of them and the fact that he was still alive, and not dead like all the others who had gone into the barn, warmed and pleased her. The two of them then set to work spilling the oil all over the bodies in the barn, and over the straw. Then they set fire to the barn.

The whole of the village of Staple Leaning—twenty-five souls—now ran to help the old farmer put out his fire.

'Let't blaze,' he said, 't'weren't a good barn anyway.' The village knew better than to contradict the old farmer. So they stood by and watched the barn blaze.

When it had quite burned down a large contingent of

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Germans appeared, in three armoured cars. They were looking for their two comrades, of course. They talked to everyone in the village, to receive blank looks. They spoke to the old farmer. They received an even blanker look from him. They went away cursing but without suspicions. They even commiserated with the old farmer at the loss of his barn.

Life went on as before at Staple Leaning. But gradually, due to the talking of the old farmer's wife, who of course knew nothing of the true story, the old farmer came to be regarded as the man who had killed three or four Germans. He became a legend in Dorset within a year or two.

7

CLARENCE CONNOLLY had been placed in Hut 45 on his arrival in the camp at Welwyn. He was annoyed to find that this was not the leading intellectual hut in the camp. For example, in Hut 46 there were all the leading critics of the leading magazines of Britain before the war. All Clarence's companions were journalists, men whom he had known off and on at El Vino's and elsewhere. The hut leader was Ted Fry, who ruled his charges with an iron hand. He undoubtedly seemed cut out for the work, nor could it be said that he took on the job because of any desire to shirk the more unpleasant duties. He even helped the men detailed to do the latrines almost every day. Connolly thought he did this because he genuinely liked the smell of latrines, which reminded him every day of Venice. (*Aie!*)

Connolly soon got to grips with life at Welwyn. He embarked first on a seemingly endless game of chess with Leslie Powell, ex-editor of the *Daily Herald*. They each made a maximum of three moves a day—since camp regulations stipulated that prisoners were allowed only one game of chess a month. Since all books were removed from them, the intellectuals of Welwyn were in a strange state. Surprisingly, many of them looked very well in these circumstances, better than they had done for many years. It was believed, however, that one noted critic had managed to secrete a copy of the Greek Anthology beneath his

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mattress. Another, on the other hand, was busy writing out a volume of Shakespeare on lavatory paper from memory. Of course, he could not remember the whole thing, but many of the people in the camp could remember parts. So that his was a work of the most careful compilation. He treated the matter far more as a crossword puzzle than as a literary exercise.

Within a few weeks of his arrival Clarence Connolly had persuaded several journalists of the camp to try and carry on as usual. This might seem difficult for journalists in a concentration camp in the heart of Hertfordshire with no newspapers, no news and no communication with the outside world at all, but Connolly nevertheless succeeded in bringing out daily a camp newsheet—each day on some different kind of paper. At this he and his companions worked tremendously hard from ten o'clock in the morning till seven at night—precisely the hours that they used to keep in Fleet Street. At eleven sharp every morning they had an editorial conference. During the exercise period they went all over the camp seeking rumours and information. All the afternoon they were busy copying out the agreed newsheet, which was distributed by the latrine emptiers first thing the next morning.

Another group of people in the camp who behaved exactly as they would outside were the Labour politicians. They never mixed with anyone else, but held incessant meetings of their executive, their finance sub-committee, their propaganda sub-committee and their foreign affairs sub-committee. They were very good at repairing their hut, which was in constant need of attention according to them. Carpentry, pasting, digging—at all these they excelled. Morris Herbison was in charge of the horticulture sub-committee, and was responsible therefore for seeing that (in the words of

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a standing order of the party passed some weeks previously) 'there shall always be a splash of colour in the beds outside the entrance to the Labour Party hut, and, if possible, creepers over the south side of the hut near the windows by the beds of the National Executive'. One day Connolly passed Dale Hughes during exercise. Looking far thinner than in the past he said: 'I should like to stop. We ought to stop and have a long chat. Unfortunately I have to get back to take the chair at our Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee. We are discussing what to do with the Balkans.'

'The Balkans,' Connolly said, 'and what are you thinking of doing with the Balkans?'

Dale Hughes answered: 'Well, very briefly, there are three plans: one, to allow them to go on as they are, and hope that eventually they will find their own level; secondly, to attempt to form them into some kind of confederation of their own; thirdly, to permit the Soviet Union to take them over, more or less, as Germany has done in the war.' He went off wrestling with this entirely abstract problem as if it were a matter of life and death.

8

CONNOLLY had been in Welwyn Camp just over a month when a new arrival followed him into Hut 45. This was none other than Beasley, the ex-chairman of the Marylebone Communist Party, and more lately—until his unexplained disappearance at the time of the Rotherhithe raid—special adviser to the great ‘Grace’. Connolly was surprised to see Beasley, since he knew him to be a communist, and communists as a rule were sent to Bangor. Some weeks later, when both were busy with the latrines, Connolly asked Beasley point blank why he was in Welwyn.

‘Oh,’ said Beasley, ‘I’ve left the party.’ He spoke in the flat tones which ex-members of the party customarily use for this glum statement of the end of a tie more demanding, terrible and close than marriage.

‘Really,’ asked Connolly surprised, ‘at this time of all times?’ He was surprised and even a little hurt that another, besides himself, should take this attitude at this time of the war. This was still a time when people were joining the Communist Party in droves rather than as individuals. Whole families would go over to communism rather than remain among the uncommitted and basically non-political parties.

Beasley said nothing. But, during the next few weeks, Connolly gradually drew the truth out of Beasley. It was clear that he was glad to tell such a terrible story, pleased to

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reveal the appalling truth which had first brought him to the concentration camp and which weighed him down while he was there.

Beasley's relations with Grace had been from the first disturbed by the (as it seemed to Beasley) excessive indulgence with which Stalin's special agent had throughout treated himself. Beasley felt shocked when Grace allocated to himself food such as could elsewhere be found only on the tables of the collaborationists. The next stage of Beasley's disillusion was when he came upon certain proof not only that Grace and his delegation were the persistent clients of the black market, but also that they were actually concerned in operating it, at least in north London. The quarrels which Beasley had with his masters now began. It was evident that it was only a matter of time before a general showdown became inevitable.

But this did not happen until, by accident, Beasley learned something far more shocking about the character of Grace's mission. For it turned out that Grace had been instructed from Moscow to make certain of the elimination of all the intellectuals of the British Communist Party. Yet even this did not cause Beasley to abandon his own assignment of his faith in communism. He was fiercely but not openly critical. Several valiant comrades were murdered, but he did not quarrel with this.

Then came the battle at Rotherhithe. During the night when this took place, Beasley was suddenly made aware not only that Grace and his friends knew what was happening but that they had also planned it themselves by allowing their Gestapo friends to gain knowledge of the meeting in question. They were in fact sacrificing the entire leadership of the

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Resistance because they saw this as a way to liquidate Macneice and Latimer, the two outstanding intellectuals of the movement of this period. The fact that so many others, who were not only innocent but not even condemned under this ruthlessly unjust programme of Stalin, had to die at the same time was of no concern to Grace. Beasley thus discovered that the whole terrible story of the battle of Rotherhithe was the work of the Communist Party, and that the informer in chief had been none other than Thomas, of the Marylebone party. His treachery had been suspected, though no one, of course, had thought this could be an act sponsored by the Comintern—though kept from the bulk of the British Communist Party.

Yet even this terrible knowledge did not cause Beasley to break with the party. He did not take this step until, later during the night of the Rotherhithe battle, a message was received from Moscow that the slaughter of the intellectuals should cease: it was the arbitrary end of the pointless killing, the end itself being as pointless as its start, which finally caused Beasley to revolt from the tyranny of his loyalty to the party. There had followed a strange scene at Edgware where Beasley, intending to appear before Grace and willy-nilly to denounce him from the depths of his being, was summoned into the presence of the Comintern chief only to vomit immediately upon the carpet, no doubt from emotion. With a feline subtlety of understanding, Grace had seemed to realize in a moment what Beasley was setting out to say.

The sequel had been swift. The same contacts with the Gestapo which Grace and his friends had used in order to secure the destruction of the Resistance leaders at Rotherhithe were now employed to take Beasley off the hands of the communists. Beasley had been allowed to leave the room in

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which he had attempted to beard Grace. Grace and three other foreign communists watched him leave without a flicker of emotion crossing their faces. Beasley was even permitted to walk down the street, to reach the Underground station, to travel homewards, and indeed even to approach his own house. And there, within twenty yards of his home, when he could already see the chinks of light which strayed beneath the black-out from his own front parlour, there he was taken up by the Gestapo.

His announcement to the German authorities that he was no longer a member of the Communist Party caused a great deal of surprise. Condemned to death, his sentence was shortly afterwards altered to life imprisonment. He had no means of knowing the reason for this curious moderation on the part of the Germans. But in fact it was due, like the same moderate treatment afforded to Connolly, to the intervention of Sir Stanley Jackson.

All this sensational news persuaded Connolly that the only course of action open to him was to attempt to escape, in order to apprise the remainder of the Resistance as soon as possible of the contemptible treachery of the communists. But this was an almost impossible task. Connolly and Beasley worked on the scheme for nearly a year before they succeeded in working out a careful but simple plan.

On the night they had selected for their escape, they went to bed at the usual time but at about one in the morning had got up and walked out to the lavatories. They made their way along the back of the huts to the commandant's office. They then got inside two dustbins standing outside the kitchen door of the office building, which they themselves had put there, in addition to the regular bins, while doing the

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latrines the previous day. Once inside the bins, they got inside two nondescript sacks which they had discovered blocking up a hole in one of the latrines. They had noticed that dustbins were not emptied immediately, but piled all together on one lorry and then emptied into the municipal lorry outside the camp. They had also, of course, worked out which day these bins were emptied. Everything went like clockwork. They covered themselves up in the dustbins with cardboard boxes so as to avoid for as long as possible the contact with dirt and other mess.

Sure enough, while the hunt for them was already beginning outside the camp—though not, of course, inside—both bins were lifted up by two puffing camp guards, who swore to each other as to the extraordinary weight of their loads but did not even lift the lids. They found themselves on a lorry, and were taken to the point near the camp entrance where the municipal dust and garbage lorry was allowed to penetrate. Here, the various dustbins were very quickly emptied, this time by ordinary English municipal workers. Connolly and Beasley were flung in their sacks into the middle of the garbage. Each of them, according to plan, had folded themselves up as tightly as possible, their hands clasping their knees. For a minute they were both near to suffocation. But they restrained their overwhelming impulses to fight to the top of the garbage until the municipal lorry had started—which it did almost immediately, though to the escaping prisoners it seemed an age. When the lorry began they moved their positions slightly, and succeeded in breathing through a mass of potato skins. Within a minute they were out of the camp.

Their day was not, of course, over. The municipal dust lorry had a great deal more garbage to collect. The whole

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morning was a fight to escape suffocation and also to escape being seen—for neither of them wanted to bring the municipal workers into their escape, however sympathetic they might perhaps have been to them. It was only at four o'clock in the gathering dusk that they managed to get off the lorry, when their chauffeurs were having a cup of tea in a café. By this time both had been sick several times. However, their luck, if not their gorge, held. Leaping off the lorry, they found the road deserted. On the left of the road there stood a high wall, which they immediately scaled, and found themselves on the edge of a park. They were by now shaking all over, not only with nausea but also with cold. But they carried on, pushing their way onwards through the undergrowth of the park, and then through the more civilized vegetation which, as it became every moment more clear, surrounded a large country mansion.

Now the fact was that the two escapees had reached the estate of none other than Lady Stoll, who was still in the country. Furthermore, at this time Lady Stoll herself happened to be in residence—a very rare thing—recovering from the exhaustion of the collaborationist season, no doubt. She was entirely alone—except for a half-dozen Irish maids. Like everyone else in the war, if they were in the country, she went to bed early. She arrived in her bedroom at about nine o'clock, undressed, put on a pair of red pyjamas, took a sleeping tablet and was shortly in the land of dreams. Somewhat to her surprise she woke up next morning to find a hirsute and naked man next to her in bed—this being of course Clarence Connolly. Future historians of the war may perhaps date the 'Turn of the Tide'—to give someone a cue for a title for his memoirs of the epoch—from this moment when Lady Stoll,

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hitherto firmly on the side of collaboration, gave herself to a left-wing journalist. This event, they may say, signified the irreproachable timing of Lady Stoll, who has always known when to change horses—even before the horses know it themselves. A shadow falls not unnaturally over the next stage of these events. It rises to find the two adventurers, both now clad in country suits left behind by Lord Stoll, sitting at a late breakfast with Lady Stoll, wearing green trousers, and reading the morning papers—all three of them—with amazing self-assurance. Now this was the very morning that Michael, Strachey and Katia left Wiltshire for their meeting that night with Lord Carr.

9

A MEETING was being held of the Central Council of the Resistance in the Stracheys' house. The meeting was to discuss the terms put to the delegation of the Council by Lord Carr. First, however, the chairman, the doctor from Macclesfield, described in factual terms how Michael had been presumed killed in the action in Dorset. 'I cannot close this tragic part of our meeting without tendering what I take to be all our sympathy with comrade Mullaly. In the best sense of the word, if I may say so, she is the widow of an hero.' What struck his hearers most was how he pedantically insisted on using the word 'an'. Even in tragedy, the doctor would always be a Monsieur Jourda 1.

The Council turned to look at Ann Mullaly. Her narrow face was disfigured by grief. Yet in this moment of sadness she could not restrain herself from turning towards Katia at the end of the table in her secretary's seat. Katia sat calm, pale and in full control of herself, without make-up. Dressed in the red shirt and black overalls of the Resistance women, she had never seemed more beautiful. And, gradually, while the committee were still nominally paying their sympathy to Ann Mullaly, the eyes of all present followed her gaze to Katia. Of course, everyone knew—how it would be impossible to say—that in Katia Michael had found his greatest happiness.

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Even Ann Mullaly knew this. 'What is the next item on the agenda?' she asked hastily.

'The next item on the agenda,' said the doctor from Macclesfield, 'is, of course, Lord Carr's terms. Well, comrades, I need not repeat what these are since they have already been circulated to all members of the Council.'

'And, of course,' said Baratov, who as usual sat in a chair away from the table, behind the communist members of the committee, 'there would seem to be no need for much discussion about the nature of those terms. They are a plain affront to the dignity of this Council and the movement as a whole. There is one point which, with respect, I would, however, suggest, comrade chairman, should be discussed first. Since it may be that there will be a vote, or series of votes, on issues discussed at this meeting, the place of comrade Michael needs to be filled on this Council. This is, of course, a seat hitherto filled by a member of the Communist Party. It would seem wise that we should—or rather you should—elect a member of that party to fill the seat vacant. I may say that I myself should be glad to take the chair for the duration of this meeting.'

'Is there any objection to comrade Grace's proposal?'

'Yes.' It was Katia. All eyes were once again turned towards her. 'I would like to propose comrade Beasley in the place of comrade Michael.'

Baratov smiled. 'But of course,' he said, 'comrade Beasley, late of the Marylebone party, would be a desirable member of this committee. But, unfortunately, he is not here. He is, we are assured, in Welwyn Camp.'

'I don't think so,' said Katia, knocking the table three times. And at this signal, the door swung open, and Beasley

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and Connolly entered. There were general exclamations. Baratov turned pale with anger and fear. 'Yes,' went on Katia, 'comrades Beasley and Connolly have recently escaped from Welwyn Camp and are here to lay their experiences there at the disposal of the Council. They also have other experiences upon which to draw.'

'Other experiences?' said Baratov. 'I do not understand.'

'You soon will, Baratov,' said Connolly bluntly. Then he turned to the Council. 'Gentlemen, ladies,' he said, 'these are very extraordinary circumstances. Beasley and I have escaped from Welwyn with one aim in view. To bring to justice the real criminals of the so-called Night of Long Knives at Rotherhithe, as we understand the occasion is now called. On our escape, I discovered that the blame was attributed very naturally by Mrs Nott to my own agent, Judith. In fact, she was from the start a member of the Resistance movement and I knew all the time about her association with Strichner, which she maintained purely and simply for the purpose of gathering information. No. The real culprits are elsewhere. Their leader is, in fact, here, in this room!'

'What can you mean?' demanded Ann Mullaly.

'The man is raving,' exclaimed Craig.

'Whom does he accuse?' asked Maria Strachey.

'I accuse,' said Connolly, 'comrade Grace, *alias* Baratov, who only a year ago handed over your comrade Beasley to the Gestapo!'

'Nonsense,' said Baratov uneasily.

'Nonsense,' laughed Beasley. 'That, I am afraid, it certainly is not. Look at Comrade Grace's face, comrades, and you will see the truth of this matter. Observe the expression.'

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Baratov said nothing. Suddenly he leapt up from his chair and made towards Beasley.

'Steady, Baratov,' said Connolly. 'I have this house surrounded. You had better give up your arms.'

'Never,' said Baratov.

'Comrades,' said Katia. 'May I now propose the expulsion of all the communist members of this Council?' General uproar greeted this remark. When it died down, Connolly said, 'Let us have a vote.'

'Certainly, a vote,' said Baratov.

'I shall take a note of the votes,' said the doctor from Macclesfield, to whom this sort of occasion was very unwelcome. 'Those in favour, hold up their hands.'

Maria Strachey, Lionel Strachey, one of the trade unionists who had hitherto said nothing and Katia herself lifted their arms.

'Those against,' cried the chairman.

Baratov, Ann Mullaly, Craig and the other trade unionist raised their arms. When it was clear that a tie had occurred, Beasley, with the hatred accumulated during months of incarceration in prison, pulled out his revolver and pointed it at Baratov. 'Withdraw your vote or I shoot you dead,' he said calmly, adding, 'this is a form of democratic procedure that I believe Mr Grace will understand.' There was a pause. Very slowly, Baratov withdrew his hand. This surrender was taken as an admission of guilt by all present, even the communists, who therefore did nothing to prevent what was about to happen.

'The time of public execution,' said Beasley, 'may be generally thought past, but there are times when it is undeniably convenient to revive it.' He paused. 'Baratov,' he

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said, 'in shooting you like a dog, I am thinking, above all, of those valiant members of the Resistance who were in effect assassinated by you in Rotherhithe so long ago. And in shooting you, I am, I think you will agree, a little less cold-blooded than you were inclined to be yourself over a year ago.' With these words, he pressed the trigger of his revolver and so gained his revenge upon his enemy. Both Grace and Baratov slumped dead in his chair.

'And now,' said Connolly, 'I should like to propose that Lord Carr's scheme as put to the Resistance delegates last week be fully accepted.'

10

ONE morning in May 1845 the streets of London were decked with flowers and crowded with spectators. The liberation parade was being held. A contingent of British forces from Canada were being permitted to enter London first under the leadership of a certain Colonel Montgomery. This contingent was, of course, the vanguard of the American divisions which had in truth liberated Britain.

Among those watching from the balconies was a large party organized by Lady Stoll.

'Do you believe, therefore, that the communists would have taken over the country if we had not accepted Lord Carr's terms?' Katia was asking Clarence Connolly.

Connolly shrugged his shoulders in his customary manner and pointed down into the street.

The golden coach was at that moment passing down Whitehall.

'What happened to the quisling government?' Katia wished to have everything clear.

'Warren, Sir Albert Rook and Liliburne have been arrested and will be tried. Sir Stanley Jackson died in prison. Father Fairlie has escaped to Spain.'

'And Mary Bright-Smith?'

'I killed her. Look, Katia, there's the Prime Minister's coach.'

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'Clarence, surely—isn't that Judith who has just come in?'

'Quite' possibly, Katia. She has emerged from Dublin. Look, Katia, aren't you interested? There goes General Patton's American mechanized corps.'

'Has Beasley left the Communist Party then?' persisted Katia. The already crowded room was now joined by Lionel and Maria Strachey. The former had ended the war as Lord Carr's deputy on the Central Council of the Resistance.

'Well, of course. So has Craig.'

'And Ann Mullaly?'

'No.'

'She has stayed in the party?'

'But yes. She is its President. It is her way of being loyal. To the past, I mean.'

Gun-carriages were now moving slowly by beneath them. And now here was Colonel Montgomery himself on a white horse.

'And you, Katia, what shall you do?'

'I shall go back to my husband,' said Katia simply.

'He may be tried for collaboration.'

'Yes, but his pictures are too good. He is right. He is above politics. And his pictures will prove that.' She hesitated. 'After all,' she said, 'in time of peace Jules is a good husband. In peace the artist is the true hero.'

'And in war?'

Katia shrugged her shoulders. 'Perhaps,' she said, thinking of Michael, as the band of the British Grenadiers passed by, 'perhaps the other way round.'
